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"YOU SEE IT IS NO USE FIGHTING AGAINST THE INEVITABLE," SAID THE STRANGER WITH LIGHT MOCKERY.

MRS. BEAVAN'S LODGER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"AUNTIE!" cried Lettice, "I have an inspiration, and if you'll promise to consider it seriously I'll tell you what it is."

Mrs. Beavan looked up and smiled—and, indeed, it was very difficult to look at Lettice without smiling. The fair young face was so round and fresh and dimpled, the blue eyes were so full of light, the rosy mouth fell into such delicious curves that he must indeed have been a misanthrope of the first water who could resist the little lady's spells. But though Mrs. Beavan smiled she shook her head rather sadly at the same time.

"Inspirations are all very well in their way, Letty, but I'm afraid they are not of much practical use when it is a question of pounds, shillings, and pence."

"But that's just where you are wrong, auntie."

My idea is intended to meet that very difficulty. Here we are in this big rambling old house, occupying three or four rooms out of a dozen, and leaving the others to the rats. Why shouldn't we make use of them—in other words, why shouldn't we take a lodger!"

Mrs. Beavan looked startled, but by no means enthusiastic.

"Who would be likely to come to this out-of-the-way place—five miles from a railway station, and ten from the nearest town? No, Letty, I'm afraid your idea won't work," she replied, despondently, as she glanced down at the pile of bills on the table before her, and then let her gaze wander out of the open window to the pretty old garden, now bathed in a golden glory of sunlight. It was shut in from the road by a high fence, but away in the distance a silvery haze marked where the sea lay at rest in the morrow light, and the faint sound of its surges breaking on the shore came to the ear in vague murmurs.

Briarwood Farm, as the house was called, was, as Lettice had said, a rambling old place, so remote from civilisation that its very existence seemed likely to be forgotten by the outside world.

Sixteen years ago it had been for sale, and had been bought by a certain Mrs. Beavan, then a young widow, who had come to it with a little child of two or three years, and had lived in it ever since.

Who she was, or whence she came no one knew, neither did she ever make the slightest allusion to her past life. People said there was a mystery about her, and at first tongues had wagged rather freely concerning her, but by degrees the gossip died a natural death, and in time the villagers grew to look upon her almost as one of themselves. Still, it was observed that she never went beyond her own gate, that she neither visited nor bestowed hospitality, and that all the time she could spare from her little farm was devoted to the education of her niece.

For some years the farm had been paying very badly, and on this special spring morning its mistress had boldly looked matters in the face, and for the first time taken Lettice into her confidence. The conclusion they both came to was that it would be impossible to meet even their small expenses unless their income could be in some way augmented, and Lettice after biting assiduously at the end of a pencil with her pretty

undecided, "it would make me very unhappy if you went out into the rain because I am here."

Her voice was not quite steady, and Page, stealing a swift glance at her face, saw something there that smote him with compunction. Tears were hanging from her lashes, ready to fall, but kept back by the pride that would have prevented his seeing them, if that had been possible. He wondered if his tone and manner had caused those tears.

"You are more considerate towards me than I deserve," he said, in a softened voice. "I am afraid I have proved myself somewhat rough and boorish. More than once it has struck me that I owe you an apology, Miss Lynn."

"Owe me an apology!" repeated Lettice, with wide open eyes.

"Yes, for my behaviour on the evening I found you arranging primroses in my sitting-room."

"Oh!" and Lettice drew a long breath, and with a sudden impulsive movement hid her face with her hands. Even yet the recollection of that evening covered her with confusion. A moment later and she was looking up into his eyes, her own very serious. "As you have mentioned the subject, Mr. Page, I hope you will let me express my regret for the foolish words you heard me say on that occasion. I thought it was my aunt who had come in; I had no idea it was you."

"I am quite aware of that. As to your words—if I remember rightly they expressed nothing but kindly feeling."

"Indeed, they were not intended to express anything else," she replied, earnestly, and she clasped her slim hands together in front of her, the fingers twisting nervously, the one in the other.

There was something pathetic in her extreme earnestness, in the childish innocence of the young face, the pleading expression of the sweet starry eyes. No man could have withstood it, and though Denis had done his best to harden his heart he had not quite succeeded.

"And instead of thanking you for your sympathy I turned away from it," he said, with something like self-reproach in his voice. "Well, you must forgive me, Miss Lynn, and blame me as little as you can help. Fate has not been kind to me, and if I have learned to regard my fellow-creatures with mistrust it is as much my misfortune as my fault."

He ended with a half groan, and then bent down to pick up a book which lay on the ground at her feet. It was a volume of Schiller's poems, in the poet's native language.

"I am trying to keep up my German," she said with a half-smile, in reply to his questioning look: "but it is rather difficult, for Auntie's stock of German books is very limited."

"Will you let me lend you some of mine? I have a good many knocking about, and if I can assist you in your reading I'll do so with pleasure."

She accepted the offer with gratitude, but the moment he had made it he half regretted it.

Why should he trouble himself about this girl? She was very fair and very sweet, but her life and his lay in different directions, and he was by no means desirous that the lines of their fate should cross.

Rather abruptly he went to the mouth of the cave, and looked out. It was getting late, and the shadows of dusk were stealing across the landscape.

"It has left off raining," he announced, and Lettice at once made preparations for departure. As he was going home, he could hardly do otherwise than escort her, so together they walked back to the farm, in the fresh, rain-scented air, whilst the thrushes and blackbirds sang their good-night songs from the wet branches, and the stars stole out one by one through the purple dusk.

They entered the grounds of the farm through a plantation of firs and larches, and as they were about half way through it, the figure of a man suddenly appeared from behind one of the trees—a ragged, disreputable, unkempt-looking creature, who stood for a moment staring at them, then plunged into the depths of the plantation, and was lost to sight amongst the shadows.

"Who can it be?" cried Lettice, in some

alarm; and involuntarily drawing nearer to her companion. "This path leads nowhere but to the house, and he can't have any business there."

"Have you no idea who he is, then?" asked Denis.

"Not the slightest. I have never set eyes on him before. He must be a tramp."

"In that case he's up to no good," observed Page. "I'll see you safely into the house, and then I'll try to find him and discover what he's doing here."

But though he spent quite half an hour in the search, it was unsuccessful. The man seemed to have disappeared, and Denis concluded that he had been alarmed at being seen, and had, in consequence, showed a clean pair of heels.

He was glad of it. There had been something curiously sinister about the fellow, and, perhaps, it was the remembrance of it that made Denis uneasy, and kept him awake half the night.

The weather, too, was rough and stormy, the wind sighed and howled by turns round the old house, and died away in pitiful sobbing gusts among the trees; every now and again a shower of rain dashed against the casement windows. And once, just before dawn, the dog chained up in the yard below gave vent to a long, melancholy howl that made the listener start up in bed half apprehensively.

He got up earlier than usual and went downstairs, imagining he was the only person yet astir. He was wrong, for the front door stood wide open, and in the porch he caught a glimpse of a woman's kneeling figure.

She rose as he approached, and he saw that it was Mrs. Beavan herself—but Mrs. Beavan looking as he had never seen her look before. Her face was drawn and white, her eyes were wild, the muscles of her mouth strained.

"What is the matter?" he asked, and, for answer, she simply stepped on one side and pointed downwards.

At her feet lay the body of a man, and it needed only one glance to convince Denis that he was dead.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, inexpressibly shocked. "It is the tramp we saw in the plantation last night! What has brought him here?"

"He came here to die," she answered in a low, tremulous voice; and, without lifting her eyes from the pallid face, "instinct guided him, for he did not know where I was."

"Then you are acquainted with him?" asked Denis, surprised.

She started slightly, as if unconscious that she had so far betrayed herself, then she bowed her head.

"Yes, I am acquainted with him. I have not seen him for many years, and he is altered, almost past recognition, but all the same, it is he—it is he!" she repeated, half-mechanically, but with such despair in her voice that Denis at once understood there must be some tragedy in her life in which this man had played a part.

"Is there anything I can do for you in this business? Shall I communicate with the local authorities?" he asked, sympathetically.

But she turned upon him almost with fierceness.

"The local authorities have nothing to do with me. He has come to me to die, and I will be responsible for his burial!" Then her tone changed, and she clasped her hands. "There is one way in which you can help me, Mr. Page, and that is by making Lettice believe this man is a complete stranger to me. There is no reason why her bright young life should be clouded by the past; the future, alas! may bring her sorrow enough."

True words; not spoken in jest, but rather in the spirit of prophecy!

And so the stranger was carried to a spare room, where he lay until he was taken thence and borne to his last resting place; and though Lettice wondered at her aunt's unusually white face and quiet manner, it never struck her that they were in any way connected with the unfortunate wayfarer who had breathed out his life in the storm.

One effect of the incident was to bring Mr. Page into closer communication with his land-

lady and her niece; and both women were struck by the gentle kindness he displayed during these sad days, and the consideration he showed towards them.

No one could now accuse him of being misanthropic. And sometimes the cloud that darkened his face would lift, and he would talk to them of the foreign lands he had visited, the strange things he had seen; but of his former home or his relatives he never breathed a word.

So far as Mrs. Beavan could see he held no sort of communication with the outside world. Ever since he had been at Briarwood Farm—now more than two months—not a single letter had come for him, neither had he written one. He did not even read the newspapers. The only way in which he kept up with the times was by reading the latest books, which were sent to him regularly every week.

Mrs. Beavan liked her lodger very much, but she sometimes wished she knew a little more about him.

CHAPTER III.

NEVER had a summer seemed so delightful to Lettice. The sun shone brighter in the azure sky than it had ever shone before; the flowers were sweeter, the songs of the birds, the whisperings of the leaves told her a new story, the winged hours flew by leaving a trail of joy behind them.

She did not question the reason of this, though sometimes her heart breathed it to her.

She saw a good deal of Mr. Page now. He helped her with her grammar, selected the books for her to read, and often came into the parlour to listen while she sang old—old ballads that had been familiar to his childhood.

One evening she had been thus singing, while Denis and her aunt sat in the window recess in the dusk watching the moon rising in silvery splendour outside.

It was very warm, and a sudden desire to breathe the fresh coolness of the outside air came over the girl.

As she finished her song she rose from the little, cracked, out-of-tune piano, and stole into the garden, where she leaned her arms on the rustic gate dividing it from the orchard. It was an exquisite night, with a faint little breeze stirring the glossy laurel foliage, and lifting the fine curls from Lettice's brow with a touch as gentle as baby fingers.

Presently she was joined by Denis, who threw away the cigarette he had been smoking.

"How pretty the garden looks in this light," he said, after a moment's pause.

Then sighing, he added,—

"I shall be sorry to leave it."

She turned to him with a start, her cheek paling.

"Leave it," she faltered. "What do you mean?"

"Only that I find I must go away, I cannot remain at Briarwood any longer."

She made no further remark, and there was silence between them. Lettice looked straight before her into the moonlight, only she saw none of its beauty now.

The world had grown suddenly dark, and cold, and chill; she shivered involuntarily.

"What is the matter?" asked Denis, who had been watching her with earnest attention, "you surely are not feeling cold?"

"Yes, I think so—a little," she returned, in a voice strangely unlike her own. "I think perhaps I had better go indoors again."

He stood aside to let her pass, then as if acting on impulse, held out his hand.

"Won't you say good-night to me, Miss Lynn?"

She hesitated for a moment before she gave him her little trembling hand, over which his fingers closed in a firm, warm clasp.

"You have not told me that you are sorry I am going!" he said, bending down so as to see her face—as white now as the tall Mary lilies in the border. "It is a selfish desire perhaps, and yet I should be glad to think you missed me."

Lettice made a great effort to steady her voice, but it was hardly successful.

"I shall miss you—very much. But perhaps you will come back?"

He shook his head.

"It is not likely."

"Then you have grown tired of the Farm—and of us."

"No. I have to go to London on business. When I went to H—— this morning to get my books I found a letter for me from my solicitor, telling me that a great-aunt, whose very existence I had well-nigh forgotten, had died and left me her fortune."

He spoke moodily enough. Lettice, who by this time had regained a modicum of self-control, looked at him in astonishment.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you—only you do not look specially pleased at your inheritance."

He shrugged his shoulders with his old hopeless gesture.

"No, why should I? Money is only worth what it will buy, and it can't buy me happiness. I wish the old lady had left every penny to a charity. I was at least content with my life before I received this letter."

"And yet," said Lettice timidly, "you say you have no wish to come back here!"

He was still holding her hand—half unconsciously, as it seemed, and now he bent down to look into her face, which became suffused with a deep blush under his gaze.

"Shall I tell you why?" he asked, his voice very low. "It is that I am afraid I have been too happy here—I have dreamed a dream from which the awakening is bound to be bitter. I came here a miserable disappointed man, disbelieving in woman's truth and goodness, but you have convinced me, against my will—of my mistake. I have learned to love you, Lettice, and that is why I am going to remain away."

Lettice trembled from head to foot, half with joy, half with despair. He loved her—he whom she had grown to look upon as a very king amongst men, and yet he was going to leave her.

She lifted her eyes for a moment to his, and he would have been blind indeed if he had not seen the message in them.

He made a quick movement as if he would draw her to him, but restrained himself by a violent effort, biting his lip hard the while. It was a minute before he spoke, and then his voice was low and hoarse.

"Lettice, I ask you to be my wife, but before you answer let me warn you of the future. If you will marry me, I swear before Heaven that my whole life shall be devoted to the task of making you happy, but beyond that I can promise nothing. I cannot introduce you to society. I cannot give you that position in the world of fashion that so many women covet. Circumstances have decreed that I should have nothing to do with society, and my life must always be more or less lonely. What those circumstances are I need not tell you, but I repeat that I love you with my whole heart and soul, and if you care enough for me to think the world well lost for my sake—then come to me."

Not for one second did she hesitate. What cared she for the pleasures of society—was not he more than all the rest of the world to her? And so in the moonlight, and with the blown scent of roses and syringa in the air, he pressed upon her lips the kiss of their betrothal.

Mrs. Beavan was not altogether pleased at the news her lodger brought her. She intimated that she wished to know something of the family of the man who would take her treasure from her.

"There is little to tell," he returned, while his brows knit themselves together in the frown she had learned to know. "I am an only child, my parents died when I was a boy, and I was brought up by Sir Robert Paget, who is my uncle. I may mention that my name is Paget, not Page, but I made the alteration in it because I wanted to be secure from all chances of interruption while I was down here. I am rich, and I will settle five hundred a year on Lettice."

Satisfactory as the last part of his speech was,

Mrs. Beavan was not quite content, but when she spoke to her niece on the subject of her doubts Lettice put them aside with resolute determination.

"I love him," she said, simply, "and the rest does not matter. His past, or his friends, are nothing to me—he is himself, and that is enough."

Poor Mrs. Beavan was absolutely carried off her feet by the headstrong current of the opposition her doubts met with. Moreover, knowing Lettice as she did, she was quite aware of the firm will underlying the girlish softness of her nature. There was nothing left for her but submission, so submit she did, and with as good a grace as possible.

Denis wished the marriage to take place in less than a month. He was going up to London, he said, on business connected with his great aunt's will, and he would order his bride's trousseau—or, at least, such portion of it, as she thought absolutely necessary; the rest she could get after they were married. And this programme he carried into effect—returning from his journey to town laden with presents for his promised bride. Lettice's breath was taken away by the magnificence of the jewels he brought her—the pearl and diamond necklace, the sapphire rings, the delicate filigree gold-work of a set of Indian gems. But after the first outburst of natural girlish pleasure she put them aside with a little sigh.

"They are very beautiful, Denis, but I am not quite sure I like your giving me such costly things. I am quite unused to them, and it emphasizes the difference in our station—the sacrifice you make in marrying me."

He laughed scornfully, even bitterly.

"The sacrifice—if there be one—is the other way round, sweetheart," he returned, with a certain amount of sadness—and sadness was becoming rare with him now. Mrs. Beavan often said she had never in her life seen a man change as he had changed since he came to the Farm. He was no longer the silent, shrinking, morose being who had done his best to keep aloof from all human companionship, but a man who carried himself proudly erect, whose eyes were bright and confident, whose whole demeanour had undergone a complete metamorphosis, and whose will carried everything before it.

Within the specified month the marriage took place, and Denis bore his bride away to the Continent, where they spent three delightful months in wanderings over sunny Italy, and then came back to Brussels, where they arranged to stay for some little time.

Afterwards Lettice said that if she never had a moment's more pleasure Fate would owe her nothing, having given her those three months!

At Brussels they took a furnished house, and Lettice set about the task of making it look "homelike," with delightful zest, and an assumption of pretty matronly airs that Denis was never tired of watching. He sent to England for a box of books and pictures, and amongst them the young wife found a photograph of a quaint old Elizabethan mansion that took her fancy immensely.

"What a lovely house!" she exclaimed, looking up from where she was kneeling in front of the half unpacked box. "Where is it, Denis?"

Paget's expression changed.

"It is my old home—the home of my ancestors for many generations," he responded briefly.

"Do you mean it belongs to you?"

He nodded assent.

"And that we shall live in it when we return to England!"

"No, we shall never live in it."

"Is it let, then?"

"No, it is not let. Two old servants are taking care of it."

"But what a pity—and such a charming place! Oh, Denis, I should like to live there so much."

"My dearest," he said, gently, taking her face between his hands, "there are reasons which would make it very painful for me to go back—at any rate, for many years to come. Perhaps in the far off future—but there!" he added,

breaking off abruptly, "Why should we talk of the future when the present is so happy?"

Lettice was silent. There were times when she wished her husband would be more open with her regarding himself—when she would have liked him to raise the curtain that shrouded his past. But she was very staunch and very loyal, and so far had never even put her desire into words.

"When do you think it likely we shall return to England, Denis?" she asked, presently.

"Not for a long time, darling, I hope. Surely you are not getting homesick?"

She laughed, but did not deny the accusation, which had more than a grain of truth in it.

"I am longing to see Auntie," she observed.

"So you shall see her. Write to her, and beg her to come over and stay with us for as long as she can. She must put in a bailiff to manage the farm. Write at once, and while you are finishing your letter I'll go and get you an English newspaper."

He bent down to kiss her, and then took up his hat and went out. Before he had proceeded far he was brought to a sudden standstill by a tall, fair, good-looking man, a year or two younger than himself, who uttered an exclamation of surprise as he saw him.

"Why Denis—Denis Paget, what in the wide world brings you here?"

"A circumstance that I ought to have communicated to you before, Reg," replied Denis, with a slightly nervous laugh, as the two men shook hands. "The fact is, I am married."

He made the announcement with a certain amount of embarrassment, and looked rather anxiously into the other's eyes to watch the effect of his intelligence which Captain Reginald Denham evidently found rather disconcerting.

"Married, are you? Well, you're a bold man. Who is the lady?"

"Her name was Lettice Lynn. You are not likely to have heard of her, for she was born and bred in the heart of the country, and it was there our wedding took place."

"A wise plan under the circumstances. I congratulate you, Denis. You must present me to the new Mrs. Paget."

Denis' expression changed, there was a perceptible hesitation in his manner which the other immediately noticed.

"Of course you will do as you like in the matter. If you would rather I didn't see her—"

"It isn't that," returned Denis, hastily, "but the fact is she knows nothing of my wretched past, and nothing of my family. She has never even heard of your existence."

Denham gave vent to a low whistle, and raised his eyebrows.

"Have you done wisely, Denis, do you think it possible such ignorance can continue?" he asked, gravely. "Secrets like yours are pretty sure to leak out sooner or later, and it seems to me it would be better to make some sort of preparation for them."

Denis made a quick gesture of impatience.

"Perhaps you are right—I don't know. I only know that Lettice is so sweet, and pure and innocent that I would not sully her ears with the story of the past. And after all, if I keep her away from England—as I intend doing—she may never learn it, and each year that goes by will make me more secure. People forget even a nine days' wonder like the one that carried my name from one end of the country to the other—in time. As to introducing you to her—I see no reason against it. You are not in the least likely to make a slip of the tongue that will betray me. By the way, why are you in Brussels, may I ask?"

Denham grinned.

"The same old game, my dear boy—trouble-some creditors. London is rather too hot to hold me at present, so I'm rusticating here until after Christmas. Living is cheap, and I contrive to amuse myself very well. I'll walk back with you to your house now if you have no objection."

If Denis had any objection he did not urge it, and thereupon he retraced his steps, and took Captain Denham back home, where Lettice,

having unpacked all the things from England, was now seated in front of the silver tea equipage, with a half pensive smile on her pretty face.

The new comer thought what a charming picture she made, seated in the ruddy glow of the wood fire, which played amongst the gold of her hair, and reflected itself in the depth of soft violet eyes that seemed to him the sweetest he had ever seen.

She acknowledged the introduction with a pretty shy grace that was infinitely becoming.

"I am so glad to meet a relative of my husband, at last!" she said, smiling. "You are the only member of his family with whom I am acquainted."

"The loss is assuredly the family's," returned Reginald, with gallant politeness.

"Are you Denis's first cousin?"

"Yes; and, like him, an orphan."

"But he has other cousins, I suppose?"

"Oh yes," Denham said, with some signs of embarrassment; "there are several other members of the family, but we are neither of us on specially good terms with them."

At this juncture Denis broke in with some irrelevant remark; and it struck Lettice that he thought the conversation was straying into forbidden channels, and it therefore behaved him to change the subject.

CHAPTER IV.

THE newly-married couple, after this, saw a good deal of Captain Denham, who, having nothing to do, was quite ready to place his time at their disposal.

At first Lettice was not quite sure whether she cared for him, but as the days passed by she made up her mind that he was an extremely agreeable addition to their circle. He was so cheery, so gay, so *debonair*, and, added to this, he was always ready to escort her on her shopping expeditions, which her husband invariably shirked if he could. In effect, he was what is known as a "lady's man"; moreover, he possessed a voice of great sweetness, and a musical ear that had been carefully cultivated, which he put to account by singing duets with Letty and giving her lessons on the violin.

It chanced that one afternoon when he had been practising with her, Denis had gone out, and as the early winter dusk was falling they found themselves alone in Letty's pretty little boudoir.

The girl stretched her arms above her head and gave a little yawn as she leaned back amongst the soft silken cushions of the couch.

"I beg your pardon," she said, laughing, as she caught Denham's eyes; "I am afraid I am very rude, but I feel just a wee bit out of sorts this afternoon—inclined to the 'blues'."

"You don't go out enough," he returned, briskly. "At your age you want gaiety and plenty of cheerful society, whereas, so far as I can make out, you see no one, and go nowhere."

Lettice's white brows puckered themselves into a frown.

"I see my husband, and his society is quite enough for my happiness," she rejoined, hotly.

Denham said nothing, but there was an expression on his face that had the effect of making the young wife feel uncomfortable.

After a slight pause she added in a lighter tone.—

"You don't appreciate domestic happiness, Captain Denham—you think it dull."

"By no means; on the contrary, I appreciate it at its full value."

"Why don't you marry, then?"

A faint shade crossed his brow.

"Why don't I marry?" he repeated, slowly and with curious emphasis. "I'll tell you why, Mrs. Paget. It is that I love a woman who belongs to another man. That is reason sufficient, is it not?"

"Oh," exclaimed Lettice, quickly and contritely, "I had no business to ask you such a question. Forgive me, and believe I spoke unthinkingly."

Involuntarily she held out her hand. He bent down and kissed it.

"I have nothing to forgive, and I am not the only man in the world who is disappointed in his dearest hopes. But I am old-fashioned enough to believe in married happiness—in the loving union of a man and woman, where each is the perfected part of the other, where every thought is shared, and there is not the shadow of a secret to come between."

Lettice put up her hand with a sudden movement intended to conceal the quivering of her lips. His words seemed to convey a sort of reproof to her husband—there was a sting in them that rankled long after the speaker had gone away. Yes, she agreed with him.

Between husband and wife there ought to be confidence, full and complete, and this confidence Denie withheld from her. What was the reason he kept her so secluded, and refused to let her make acquaintances?

Not that Lettice minded the isolation. As she had told his cousin, her husband's society was sufficient for her; but she confessed to herself that his reticence was hard to bear.

The next day they all three went to one of the picture-galleries. Lettice and Denham were a little in front of Denis, who was absorbed in the examination of one of the pictures, when the young wife's attention was attracted to a gentleman who was approaching—tall, fine soldierly-looking man, with iron-grey hair and moustache, and aquiline features.

"What a handsome man!" she said to Reginald. "I am quite sure he is English."

He smiled at her patriotic enthusiasm, as he turned to look at the object of it.

"Why, that is Sir Robert Paget—my uncle," he exclaimed, in surprise.

"And Denis's uncle as well, isn't he?"

"Yes, he and your husband's father were brothers, and my mother was their sister."

At this moment Sir Robert came up level with them, and after an astonished glance, shook hands with his nephew.

"Why, Reginald, is it really you? I thought you were rustinating in Italy!"

"I have left Italy some time," Denham responded. Seeing his uncle's eyes resting admiringly on Lettice he added, "Permit me to introduce you to a new member of the family—Mrs. Denis Paget."

The elder man bowed ceremoniously.

"I beg your pardon," he said to Reginald, "I don't think I caught this lady's name aright. Whom did you say?"

"Mrs. Denis Paget—the wife of your nephew, my cousin Denis," Denham replied, very distinctly, and deliberately.

"Good Heavens! Has that villain dared," began Sir Robert, furiously, and then he pulled himself up short. Beside him stood Denis himself.

It was clear to Lettice that her husband was taken at a disadvantage. A deep red stained his brow, and he half hesitated, as though doubtful whether to advance or retreat. Finally, he took a step forward, and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Uncle Robert?" he said, boldly.

His advance was met by a cold stare. Sir Robert drew back.

"Sir," he said, haughtily, "Reasons, which you will easily guess, force me to decline the honour of your acquaintance;" and with a ceremonious bow to Lettice he walked on and straight out of the gallery.

Denis had grown deadly pale—white even to the lips; but he made no attempt to answer, and, as his uncle disappeared, he turned to his wife with a forced smile.

"Let us go home," he said, in a voice of unnatural calm; and without a word she followed him, while Denham, apparently feeling himself *de trop*, hastily made his adieu.

In utter silence husband and wife walked back, and Lettice went up to her own room, white and miserable, and sat down in front of the window, trying to realize the scene through which she had just passed.

Sir Robert Paget—a man whose name was known and honoured everywhere—had called Denis a villain, and had refused his offered hand, while Denis had accepted the insult, and let it

pass without a word of retaliation. What did it mean?

Surely he would come to her and explain his conduct—surely he would see that his duty as a husband required that he should justify himself in her estimation!

She waited there all the afternoon, feeling sick and bewildered, listening with miserable expectation for his footsteps on the stairs. But she listened in vain. Hour after hour passed and yet he did not come, and when the evening shadows gathered, and her limbs grew stiff and numb with the cold, her fortitude gave way, and she threw herself on the couch in an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

Presently there came a tap at the door. It was one of the maids come to light the gas. Lettice rose and went to her dressing-room, where she bathed her face, and did her best to remove from it all traces of emotion. Of Denis she saw nothing until she went down to dinner, and then she found he had invited his cousin to be present at the meal.

"And afterwards we are all going to the theatre," he said, in his ordinary voice. Evidently he intended to entirely ignore the scene that had taken place in the picture gallery. Neither did he allude to it afterwards. The young wife was too proud to try and force a confidence which she now felt to be her right, but she could not prevent a shadow of constraint from appearing in her manner, and it proved the beginning of that "little rift within the lute" which every hour has the effect of widening.

Of this Denis was keenly conscious, and it made him wretched, but he refrained from doing the only thing that could have bridged the gulf, and day by day the husband and wife drifted farther apart.

Thus it happened that as she saw less of Denis she saw more of Reginald, into whose society she was indeed constantly thrown. The strain too began to tell on her, she grew pale and thin and restless, and Denis wanted to take her to the South of France. But she refused to go. Her aunt had promised to come over and spend Christmas with her, and it seemed to Lettice that this was the only thing she had to look forward to.

It was very rarely she and Denis went out together now, but one day they had been skating on the ice-bound pond, and were returning in the evening, when Lettice became uncomfortably conscious that she was being followed by a tall, darkly clad woman, who wore a thick veil that entirely concealed her features.

"Denis!" exclaimed the young girl, taking hold of his arm in her apprehension, "I am sure that woman is a pickpocket."

"Which woman?"

"The one we have just passed."

But Denis had not seen her, and when he looked round she had disappeared in one of the shops.

"You are nervous," he said, smiling down into his wife's face. "And yet when you were at Briarwood I never observed a symptom of nerves in you."

"I was happy then, and had nothing to try my nerves," she replied, a little bitterly, and he only sighed, without asking her to explain her meaning—which was indeed only too visible to him!

Two days later, when she was going out for her usual morning walk, she was very unpleasantly surprised by the sight of the same tall, black-robed woman, standing opposite the house, and gazing intently up at the windows.

Her first impulse was to turn back; but such a course seemed like a timid yielding to weak fears, so she kept on her way, determined to ignore them as far as possible. After proceeding some distance she glanced back. Yes, there was the woman following her, and on seeing herself observed she came boldly forward, and spoke.

"Madame, you are English," she said, in a rich, musical voice. "I want to ask your assistance on behalf of a countrywoman who is in great distress."

Lettice came to a pause immediately, and half her terror vanished as the woman addressed

her. After all she was only a semi-genteel beggar.

"I am afraid I cannot help you," she said, regretfully, vainly searching in her pockets, "for I find I have left my purse at home."

"Ah, madame, that excuse is unworthy of you," exclaimed the other, with a mocking laugh, coming up close, and peering down into the girl's face. "If you said you *would* not give me anything I should believe you the more readily."

"You may believe me or not as you choose," said Lettice, turning away with quiet dignity.

"Stay!" commanded the woman, in an imperious tone. "If you will not give me money, you can oblige me in another way. Raise your veil and let me see the face of Denis Paget's wife!"

She burst into a laugh as she pronounced the last words, in which she contrived to infuse inexpressible scorn. Lettice was really frightened, and it was with some difficulty she preserved her self-possession.

"If you do not go away at once and cease annoying me I will call a policeman and have you arrested," she said, quietly enough, but with a firmness that convinced her hearer she meant what she threatened.

The woman moved slowly aside.

"Very well, my charming young lady. I obey you to-day because it is your hour of triumph. But wait! In a very short time the tables will be turned, and then we will see who commands and who obeys!"

CHAPTER V.

LETTICE was more disturbed than she would have cared to acknowledge by this unpleasant incident. It was not the strange woman's words—though they were insolent enough—so much as her manner that had impressed her so disagreeably, and when she reached home she made up her mind to tell her husband all that had taken place, and hear what he had to say concerning it.

Unfortunately the opportunity for doing this was not given her. Denis did not join her at luncheon, but sent the excuse of a bad headache, and remained in the room that was called his "study," while the young wife sat down to the meal alone. For some reason or other she stayed in the dining-room longer than usual, and just as it was growing dusk she heard a ring at the bell, followed by the sound of footsteps in the passage outside.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Paget, take me to his room direct," said a voice she recognized—the voice of the woman who had accosted her, and the servant at once obeyed, while Lettice, half-stupefied by this new development, sprang from her seat, and, distracted with doubts, began to pace the limits of the room.

"She is only a beggar, she has only come to get some money from him," she said to herself, over and over again; but as the minutes passed by and lengthened into half-an-hour, she could no longer lay this flatteringunction to her soul. If the stranger had been a beggar her interview would have been cut short long ago.

"I will go to the study and find out for myself who and what she is!" she exclaimed at last. "I am his wife, and I have a right to know."

Without giving her resolve time to cool she crossed the hall and turned the handle of the study door, determined to solve the mystery without delay. Half-way across the door, on the inner side, stood a large screen, placed there to exclude the draught, and behind this Lettice paused for a moment, her heart beating so fast that she could hardly draw her breath. Through the chinks of the screen she could see the interior of the room, lighted up as it was by the rays of a hanging lamp, and the tableau that met her gaze was this. Denis standing near the mantel-piece, with folded arms and bent head, and his companion facing him from the other side of the hearth.

Her veil was thrown back, and her face revealed—a hard, dissipated looking face that had once been gloriously handsome, and which now wore an expression of triumphant malice,

She was speaking as Lettice entered—and, perhaps, this may have prevented her from noticing the click of the handle as the young girl turned it.

"So you see it is no use fighting against the inevitable, as typified by me," she was saying, with light mockery. "I am your wife, and not all the Law-Courts in England can set aside my claims on you."

"Too well I know it!" was his despairing reply, accompanied by a deep groan, as his head sank lower down on his breast.

For a few seconds Lettice stood as still as some marble statue—absolutely incapable of thought or movement—hardly breathing, in her dazed bewilderment. Then she dragged herself painfully from the study, and got as far as the bottom of the stairs, where she sank down, a white, helpless heap, not quite fainting, and not quite conscious, only knowing that a blow had been dealt her, so deadly in its effects that it would take her some time even to realize it.

It was thus Reginald Denham found her a quarter of an hour later when he let himself in with the latchkey his cousin had given him. And never, though he should live a hundred years, will he forget the white despair of the poor child's face as he came towards her, and carried her to the dining-room, where he placed her tenderly on a couch.

He had hardly accomplished this when the study door was thrown violently open, and the stranger came out. In an instant Lettice had risen to her feet, and grasped the arm of her companion.

"Go and look at that woman—don't let her see you,—and then tell me who she is!" she muttered in a tragic whisper.

He obeyed, standing in the shadow of the curtain that veiled the doorway, and when he came back to Lettice his face was almost as white as hers.

"Well!" the young girl exclaimed harshly, "I see you recognize her. Who is she?"

He shook his head without speaking, and wiped his damp brow with a handkerchief.

"Tell me!" she continued, imperiously. "I have a right to know. Is she the real wife of the man I have always regarded as my husband?"

Very slowly and reluctantly—as if the words were dragged from him—his answer came, "She is."

And then Lettice felt that the last straw of hope to which she had clung had failed her. This, then, was the secret Denis had been at such pains to hide from her—this was the reason he had kept her away from all his friends—this was why his uncle had called him a "villain," and refused to take his offered hand!

She was silent for a few minutes, her face hidden. When she raised it it was whiter even than before, but there was a new expression of resolve in the steadfast eyes.

"I must leave this house at once, and get back to Briarwood. I shall take no luggage, and only enough money to pay my fare to England. Will you take me to the station, Captain Denham?"

"My dear Mrs. Paget," he began, but she put out her hands with a little, half-strangled cry.

"Don't call me by that name—I have no right to it, and I must never again see the man I believed to be my husband. Up to now I am innocent, at least in intention, but if I remained another hour under this roof I should feel I had sinned."

"I will do whatever you wish," Reginald Denham said in a lowered voice; "but you must let me see you farther than the station. I shall escort you to your aunt's house."

She made no demur—indeed it is doubtful whether she heard him. With a little gold pencil attached to her watch-chain she was scribbling a farewell note to Denis, telling him she knew his secret, and begging him not to follow her, and having sealed this, and put on her hat and cloak she announced herself ready to start.

Afterwards, when she looked back on that journey, it seemed like a horrible dream. The rush and hurry of the station, the long ride in the railway carriage through the flat dark land, the embarking on the steamer, and crossing to

Dover, and last of all her aunt's joyful surprise as she saw her, and Reginald Denham's farewell—all seemed ghostly and unreal—a nightmare from which she would wake up presently, and laugh at the misery she had endured.

But during the days that followed she had ample time to realize the terrible thing that had befallen her.

She told her wretched story to her aunt, and Mrs. Beavan could give her no word of hope—although she did not cease blaming herself for having permitted the marriage.

"I ought to have made more inquiries about him," she said, remorsefully. "I suspected from the first that he had something to conceal. Oh, I have been very much to blame—I shall never forgive myself, never, never!"

Her self-reproach grew keener as the days passed by, and Lettice became thinner, paler, more listless.

It seemed as if she had lost all interest in life. The only thing that roused her was an occasional letter from Reginald Denham, who, however, never made any mention of Denis, though Lettice's first action on opening the epistle was to look eagerly along the lines in the hope of seeing his name.

One day, when Christmas was quite near, she was surprised by a visit from the young man, and still more surprised when he announced the object of it, which was nothing less than a passionate declaration of love, and an offer of his hand.

"It seems to me that I loved you from the first moment that I set eyes on you," he exclaimed, as they sat together in the bay windowed parlour that used to be Denis's. "But you will do me the justice to acknowledge that I never let you have the faintest suspicion of my true feelings. Now that you know the truth, and are free, I ask you to confide your life to my care, and believe me, you shall never have cause to regret it!"

It is difficult to express the amazement—the disgust even, with which the young girl regarded him. In spite of all that had happened she still looked upon herself as Denis's wife, and to hear words of love addressed to her by another man was horror unspeakable.

For a moment she did not speak, but as Reginald approached, and would have taken her in his arms, she pushed him violently away.

"Hush!" she exclaimed. "You do not understand, or you would not dare address such words to me. I can never forget that I swore at the altar to cleave to Denis all my life long, and I still look upon myself as his wife, though I know I have no legal claim on him. It would be impossible for me even to think of marrying anyone else."

"But this is absurd—a mere delusion!" he returned, angrily. "Think of the way Denis has behaved to you, and then think of the long, lonely, loveless years stretching out before you. You are young, and it is cruel to condemn yourself to such an existence."

But she only shook her head, and, in spite of all his arguments, remained unconvinced, and at last Reginald, sorely chagrined, went away, feeling that she had spoken truly when she said that her whole life would be dedicated to the memory of a lost love.

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTMAS came and went. The new year was ushered in by wild storms that dashed against the casement windows of Briarwood, and sent gusts of wind down the old-fashioned chimney.

After that the weather grew milder, and Mrs. Beavan hoped when the first snowdrops tremblingly appeared that Lettice would gain health and vigour with the lengthening days and the sunshine.

But her hopes were vain; the young girl remained as listless and dispirited as before. It is true she had resumed her old duties in the household, but she performed them in a mechanical manner, and with a lack of interest that made Mrs. Beavan's heart ache.

The poor woman was half distraught with

anxiety. What could she do to bring the roses back to those pale cheeks, the old joyousness to the poor tired heart?

Alas, nothing. Lettice was one of those women to whom inconstancy or forgetfulness is impossible. Even yet, and in spite of everything, her heart clung to Denis, and would so continue to cling until the end.

One afternoon in February aunt and nieces were seated together in front of the fire, when the unexpected apparition of a stranger coming along the path made them both look up in astonishment.

A few minutes later, and the little maid-of-all-work threw open the parlour door to admit a tall military-looking man, with iron-grey hair and moustache, whom she announced as—

"Sir Robert Paget."

Lettice had started up pale and trembling, recognizing in the stranger the man who had refused to shake hands with Denis in the Brussels picture gallery.

"I am come as an ambassador," he said, after shaking hands with both ladies, and taking the seat they offered. "I have had the pleasure of meeting you before," he added to Lettice. "Perhaps you remember the occasion?"

"I remember it perfectly."

He seemed slightly embarrassed, and pulled his grey moustache with nervous fingers.

"At that time I was not on terms of friendship with my nephew," he continued, "but since then circumstances have occurred which have placed his conduct in an entirely different light, and I have altered my opinion with regard to him. I am here to-day at his request."

"Wait a moment, Sir Robert," exclaimed Mrs. Beavan, interrupting him agitatedly. "Do you think it is any good going on with your embassy? My niece has finally cut herself off from Mr. Denis Paget, and it can do no good to reopen old wounds."

"Pardon me, madam; if I venture to disagree with you," he rejoined, politely. "This young lady is under the impression that my nephew has played the part of a scoundrel towards her, and if I can assure her that such is not the case it will at any rate disabuse her mind of a false impression."

"But you do not mean to say that he was not already married when he went through the ceremony of marriage with me?" cried Lettice in uncontrollable emotion.

Sir Robert shook his head.

"No, I am sorry to say there can be no doubt he was married, and his wife was alive. But what I want to impress upon you is that he did not at the time know she was alive—and this must make all the difference in the view you take of his conduct."

It did indeed make all the difference.

"Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the girl, fervently.

Then she raised her head proudly.

"I can bear anything now—even separation from him. The terrible part of my sorrow has been the belief that he wilfully deceived me."

"That is what he himself felt," said Sir Robert, whose manner conveyed a delicate and yet tender sympathy. "Will you give me permission to tell you the whole of his story now?"

Both women made a movement of assent, and Sir Robert continued, addressing himself to Lettice,—

"Since the night you left him Denis has been very ill. After reading your note it seems he rushed out into the streets with the intention of following you, but half distraught as he was he did not heed where he was going, and was knocked down by a passing carriage, with the result that his brain was injured, and concussion followed. For some time he lay hovering between life and death, and when he became a little better he sent for me.

"My first impulse was not to go, but his request was so urgent that I finally put my scruples in my pocket, and obeyed it, with the result that I am here now."

"My nephew told me of your departure, and the reason for it. He was unable to write himself but he implored me to see you, and lay the whole

of the facts before you, and this I promised to do for his justification."

"I will begin the story at the beginning, that is to say, at the date of Denis's first marriage, which took place nearly ten years ago. Up to that time he was one of the finest fellows in the world, brave, generous, kindly; but his marriage spoiled him.

"His wife was a beautiful fury, who made his life a burden to him. Reckless and extravagant, she spent all his money, and then, when his estate was mortgaged to the hilt, turned round and reproached him with his poverty.

"For some years this sort of thing went on, Denis providing for the expenses of the household by literary work, and being treated by his wife with contemptuous scorn.

"Then, all of a sudden, she disappeared, and her hat and scarf were found floating down the river near which their house stood. Inquiries were made, and finally, Denis himself was arrested on suspicion of having murdered her, as he was the last person in whose company she had been seen.

"His statement was to the effect that he had gone for a walk with his wife on the night in question, and that they had quarrelled, which he admitted was nothing unusual.

"The fact of the quarrel was proved by a labourer, who had met them on the river-bank, and overheard the lady taunting her husband with having a desire for her death.

"'You would kill me, if you dared,' she had said, and he had retorted, passionately,—

"'I would, indeed.' He admitted saying the words, which, he added, were spoken in mad passion, and were not seriously meant.

"His story was that, after upbraiding him, and telling him her life was a misery to her—for he had brought her down to this lonely country-house in order to try and cure her of her love of brandy—"she finally declared she preferred death to being shut up all alone with him, and then threw herself into the river.

"By this time it was quite dark, and though Denis declared he dived in after her, he did not succeed in finding her. He added that he believed she could swim; but this was supposed to be an invention on his part. And, in the end, the magistrate, before whom the inquiry was made, committed him for trial on a charge of 'wilful murder,' refusing to accept bail.

"Accordingly he was tried at the next Assizes; but the evidence against him, being purely circumstantial, was held to be not strong enough for his conviction, therefore he was acquitted, although the majority of people thought him guilty, as I myself did. And it was for this reason that I refused to have anything more to do with him, and that I would not take his hand when he offered it me. In fact, I cast him off altogether, as did nearly all his friends. Mind, I did not believe the crime premeditated, but, knowing the life that woman had led him, I thought he had pushed her into the river in a moment of madness.

"For some time after the trial he wandered about America, but finally returned to England and came down here for the purpose of reuniting his literary labours. And of what happened here you know far better than I can tell you. Believing himself free, he married you; but he made one great mistake, he should have told you the story of his past life."

"I wish he had—oh, I wish he had!" murmured Lettice, clasping her hands together.

Sir Robert looked at her curiously.

"You would still have married him?" he said.

"Yes—yes! But I should not have had the pain of doubting him all this long time."

"Ah, well," resumed the Baronet, "we all do foolish things occasionally, and, as a rule, we pay for them. He has paid for his error pretty dearly."

"When his wife forced her way into his presence at Brussels he was, as you may imagine, horrified to the last degree; but there was no disputing her identity, and she at once proceeded to give him an explanation both of her disappearance and her re-appearance.

"It seems she was tired of the life she had

been leading with him—tired of its monotony, its poverty, and of him; she resolved to leave him, and had made her plans accordingly.

"When she threw herself into the river it was with no intention of suicide; for, as a matter of fact, she could swim like a fish. And having, under cover of the darkness, reached the other side of the stream, she made her way to an empty house where she had already deposited a change of clothes; and then, having veiled her face to prevent all chance of recognition, managed to get to Liverpool, whence she crossed to America. What her career was there I have no means of knowing, but I should imagine it was fairly successful for the first two years, though latterly her fortunes seem to have fallen to rather a low ebb."

"Unluckily she learned—in what way I cannot tell—that Denis had lately inherited a large sum of money, and this aroused her cupidity. She resolved to return to him and share his newly-acquired inheritance. Accordingly she came to England and contrived to find out his whereabouts, upon which she went to Brussels, and there she discovered the fact of his second marriage."

The Baronet stopped and looked at Lettice, who had remained perfectly motionless during his recital.

"Have I made everything plain to you; will you send a message of forgiveness to Denis?" he asked, gently.

"I have nothing to forgive—I can only love and pity!" she exclaimed, passionately. She was white and trembling, and yet there was a strange light of joy in her eyes. After a few minutes' silence she came over to Sir Robert, and held out her hands. "Will you tell him this—that my heart is full of tenderness and sorrow for him, and gladness for myself, inasmuch as I know now that he was worthy of the love I gave him? We may never see each other again on earth; but the tie between us is one that eternity itself cannot break!"

And then, without another word, she left the room.

"She is a queen amongst women; no wonder Denis loves her so!" said Sir Robert, blowing his nose violently to conceal a suspicious appearance about his eyes. "And he does love her too. In his delirium her name was always on his lips—it was Lettice from morning till night—as it is in his heart now."

Mrs. Beavan was gazing miserably before her into the fire. This revelation of the Baronet's, though it exonerated Denis, did not, so far as she could see, improve the position very materially.

"I wonder what will be the end of it all!" she murmured, more to herself than to her companion. He, however, caught the words, and replied to them.

"I know what would be the end of it if I were in Denis's place!" he exclaimed. "I would do a divorce from this wretched woman, Ermyntrude; it ought to be easy enough after her conduct, or there's no justice in England."

"Ermyntrude!" repeated Mrs. Beavan, with a slight start. "Is that his wife's name? Who was she before he married her?"

"That I cannot say; but my impression is she was a widow. He met her in Italy, where she was singing in public, I believe; and her pretty face made a fool of him. There is no denying she was at that time a very beautiful woman, though she must have been a good six or seven years older than he was—the difference in age did not matter then, but it tells now!"

A change had come over Mrs. Beavan, her face was flushed, her manner restless. She looked uncertainly at the Baronet, as if hesitating whether she should take him into her confidence. Finally, she said in a quick, excited way,

"Do you think you could get me this woman's portrait? I do not care out of mere idle curiosity; but because an idea has occurred to me which, if it prove true—"

She caught her breath sharply, and checked herself, as if afraid of saying too much.

Sir Robert looked at her curiously, and waited for a moment before he replied.

"Yes," he said, at last, "I think I can get you her portrait. I'm a bit of a photographer myself

and if other means fail I'll take a snap shot, and send you the result."

CHAPTER VI.

DURING the next few days it almost seemed as if aunt and niece had changed places, for while Lettice was calmer and more composed than she had been since her return Mrs. Beavan developed a nervous restlessness that was, as a rule, entirely foreign to her.

She appeared to be in a constant state of hardly repressed excitement and expectation; the slightest sound made her start, while the footstep of the postman on the gravelled walk threw her into an absolute fever.

At length one morning, about a fortnight after Sir Robert's visit, a small parcel arrived for her, which she opened with trembling fingers. It contained the portrait of a woman—beautiful, bold, defiant-looking. A strange little cry broke from Mrs. Beavan's lips as she beheld it, and at the sound Lettice came round to her side.

But the words she would have spoken died unuttered, for she could not avoid seeing the picture and recognising it.

"It is that woman—Denis's wife!" she murmured, hoarsely; and with a swift, involuntary movement she hid her eyes with her hands as if to shut out the sight of that beautiful mocking face, which had wrought so much evil. "Aunt, who has sent this photograph to you?" she asked presently.

"Sir Robert sent it at my request. Something he said made me suspect I knew the original of it, and that is why I was anxious to have it. I find my suspicions are correct. This woman and I used to be old friends, till her treachery parted us."

Lettice gazed at her aunt with astonishment. Never before had she seen her so agitated. A bright pink flush had leapt into her usually pale face, her eyes glittered, her lips quivered, and yet, in spite of her emotion, she looked strangely triumphant.

"Lettie, darling," she said, controlling herself by an effort, "sit down beside me and put your hand in mine, while you listen to the history of my youth—a history that I should never have told you, but for the connection it has with your own sorrowful story. You have often wondered how it was you and I lived in this lonely place for so many years without holding any communication with the outside world, and without—as you believed—a single relation to take the slightest interest in our welfare. Well, you shall now hear the reason.

"Your mother and I were orphans, left to the care of an aunt and uncle, who were good and well-meaning people, but terribly strict and narrow minded!"

"Your mother, who was older than I, ran away to marry a man of whom our guardians disapproved, and terrible indeed was their anger at her conduct. I was forbidden to hold any communication with her, and I need hardly tell you, my life was very miserable in consequence.

"Then something happened one day which made all the difference in the world to me. I fell in love with a young man who had recently come to our little country town, and it was arranged our marriage should take place on my twenty-first birthday.

"I was wildly, deliriously happy. Everything seemed to favour me. Ralph Carruthers was young, and handsome, and fairly well off; moreover he was devoted to me.

"All the details of the marriage were arranged, my trousseau was ready, and my old friend Emyntre Weston came to stay with me for a month beforehand, as she was to be my bridesmaid."

Mrs. Beavan paused, and wiped her lips with her handkerchief.

When she resumed, her voice was lower and her words more hurried.

"Emyntre was without exception the most lovely creature I ever saw, and—well, I suppose men are weak when it is a question of a woman's beauty, and I can hardly wonder that Ralph succumbed to her fascinations.

"If they had told me the truth I almost think

I could have forgiven them, but they were either afraid or ashamed to do this, and they let me go on to my wedding-day without my even suspecting that anything was wrong.

"Then when the clergyman was waiting at the altar, when I was dressed in my bridal finery and orange blossoms, and the guests had all assembled—then word was brought me that bridegroom and bridesmaid were not to be found—that they had gone away together!"

"Poor, poor auntie!" Lettice murmured, almost below her breath, as she drew nearer the stricken woman. "What a terrible fate. It was enough to drive you mad."

"I think I was mad for a while, but when I recovered my one idea was to get away from my home and everyone who knew my wretched history—to merge my very identity, if that were possible."

"Just then your mother and father died, and you, a poor helpless baby, were brought to me. My guardians refused to have anything to do with you, and this put the finishing touch to my resolution. I was twenty-one and my own mistress. I had a small sum of money, and I resolved to leave home and my old life and begin a new one with you."

"By the help of our lawyer, who has been my best friend, I was able to realize my desire, and it was on his advice that I changed my name, and called myself Mrs. instead of Miss. As a widow he thought I should be able to get on better than as a single woman—and I think he was right. With the money I had I bought this farm, and have lived here ever since."

"And he—your false lover—what became of him?"

Mrs. Beavan averted her face for a moment.

"Do you remember the tramp who alarmed you in the summer and who died here on the doorstep?"

"Yes, yes."

"That was he. What had happened to him in the meantime I can only guess from his wretched attire. Evidently he had drunk the cup of misery and disappointment to its lowest dregs but whether he came to this house because he knew it was tenanted by the woman who had never ceased to love him, or whether accident alone guided him I cannot tell. As to his wife—for they were married—I can only suppose she deserted him."

"Then, perhaps, she is still alive?"

"She is alive—more than that, you have seen her. Lettice, prepare yourself for a great surprise. The original of this picture," she laid her hand on the one in her lap, "and Emyntre, are one and the same woman. Do you see now what I meant by saying your sorrow and mine were connected with each other?"

Even yet Lettice did not quite realize the full meaning of her aunt's words, but gradually their significance broke upon her. She started to her feet, her breast heaving tumultuously.

"You mean that Denis' wife and your treacherous friend—the woman who stole your lover from you—"

She stopped, from sheer inability to complete her sentence.

"Yes," Mrs. Beavan said, "she it was who married Denis Paget in Italy, five years ago. But that marriage was not legal. When it took place her first husband was still alive, as I can prove, therefore the ceremony was a mere farce so far as she was concerned."

"Then Denis is free!"

"No, he is not free, inasmuch as he was married to you a few months ago. You, and not Emyntre, are his wedded wife."

Strange as was the coincidence, and wild as Mrs. Beavan's theory at first sounded, it was, nevertheless, quite true, although it took some little time to prove it. As Denis himself was still too ill to leave his bed Mrs. Beavan wrote to Sir Robert Paget, who paid a second visit to Briarwood, and listened with very considerable amazement to the facts narrated, to him by its mistress.

"It sounds like a page out of a novel," he said, as she finished, and then he rose from his chair,

and walked excitedly up and down the room, rubbing his hands meanwhile.

"What news it will be for Denis—better than all the doctor's stuff that they are giving him at the present moment! But before we breathe a word of it to him I had better lay all the facts and dates before a good shrewd lawyer, and let him manage the whole affair for us—for you may be quite sure Madame Emyntre won't resign her position without a struggle! A woman who, out of revenge, was capable of plotting against her husband as she did, and letting him rest under the accusation of drowning her, cannot expect much mercy at our hands, and precious little she'll get, so far as I am concerned! There is one thing I should very much like to know, and that is, how she got wind of the fortune that his great aunt left Denis."

His prophecy proved correct. Emyntre fought hard for what she called her "rights," and absolutely denied the truth of Mrs. Beavan's accusation. But in these days of quick travelling and electric communication it is more than a little difficult to destroy traces of identity, and step by step her past life was traced until it was no longer possible for her to persist in her denial.

Sir Robert, in conjunction with his lawyers, undertook to make all necessary inquiries, and threw himself into the task with an ardour that considerably astonished his man of business. Perhaps he had a double motive for his zest; not only did he desire to see Lettice justified in the eyes of the world, but he also wished to make some sort of amends to Denis for his past harsh judgment of the young man.

When the proofs were all in his hands he left London for Brussels—where Denis still lay ill in his room, caring little whether he lived or whether he died. He had quite recovered from the effects of his accident, but the doctors declared themselves powerless to cope with the listless apathy that had fallen upon him, and from which he made no effort to rouse himself.

Meanwhile, Emyntre had installed herself as mistress of the house, and into her presence Sir Robert was ushered on his arrival.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," she said, rising from the arm-chair in which she had been reclining, and coming forward to meet him, "I am very glad to see you, Sir Robert."

She looked very different from the shabby, disreputable creature who had accosted Lettice in the streets a few months ago. Her dress was of richest brocade, plentifully trimmed with costly lace, jewels flashed on her fingers, her wrists, and at her throat, while art had evidently been called in to repair the damages Time had wrought in her face. Her red lips curved in an insolent smile, her whole demeanour was indicative of triumph as she held out her hand to the Baronet.

But he drew coldly back, thinking of the pale loveliness of the girl to whom he had said "farewell" at Briarwood Farm.

"I am afraid when you leave my errand you will hardly be disposed to afford me a very cordial welcome," he said drily, but she only laughed.

"I think I can guess. You wish to make out that the story told you by that very mad person in Cornwall is true! But my position is far too secure to be affected by such a ridiculous tale. I am Denis Paget's wife; and I defy you and all the world to prove otherwise."

Sir Robert took from his pocket-book certain papers, and silently handed them to her. The first was a certificate of the marriage of Emyntre Weston with Ralph Carruthers, in June, 187—, the second was a certificate of Ralph Carruthers' burial less than a year ago.

Her face changed slightly as she read them, but she tossed them on the table defiantly.

"There are more than two Ralph Carruthers in the world; there may be half-a-dozen, for all I can tell. I acknowledge that I had been married before I became the wife of your nephew, but my husband had died years before, and I was a widow."

"You are wrong, Mrs. Carruthers; the man, whose burial certificate lies there was your husband, and I have several witnesses to prove it.

If you will kindly read this statement, which my lawyer has prepared, you will see the uselessness of further denial."

It contained a list of half-a-dozen people to whom Carruthers had applied for assistance just before his journey to Cornwall—people who, in spite of the alteration in his appearance, had recognised him, and were ready to swear to his identity.

Besides this, there were original documents found on the dead body of the miserable man which placed his identity beyond dispute. Ermynde was far too clever not to see the hopelessness of her position.

With a little gesture of despair she threw herself in the armchair again.

"Fate is against me, and it is useless to fight any longer," she muttered, sullenly. "All the same, I repeat that, when I contracted my second marriage, I believed myself a widow. Ralph and I had separated, and I heard a little while afterwards that he was dead."

"I see no reason to doubt your assertion, and I shall advise my nephew to settle an annuity on you in consideration of your signing a deed acknowledging that the ceremony of marriage you went through with him was illegal."

"It ought to be a very handsome annuity," she exclaimed, frowning. "He is rich enough to afford it. Reginald Denham tells me his income is at least five thousand a year."

The Baronet looked at her sharply.

"Reginald Denham!" he repeated. "How came he to tell you that?"

"He had his own reasons, I suppose." A malicious light came in her eyes. "Shall I confess the truth, Sir Robert, it can do me no harm now, and I am not altogether pleased at the way Mr. Reginald has behaved to me! Well, then, it was he who sent me word that Denis had become rich, and who advised me to return to him, the fact being that he had fallen desperately in love with his cousin's wife. Very ingenuous of him, wasn't it?"

"But, good Heavens!" exclaimed the Baronet, "do you mean to say that Reginald knew you were alive while his cousin was being put on his trial for your murder?"

"No, he is not quite so bad as that; but he met me in America eighteen months ago, and I knew I could depend on his not betraying me."

"How did you know this?"

She smiled scornfully, and shrugged her shoulders.

"What a question to ask! Have you forgotten that Denis used to be your favourite nephew, and that so long as he was in disgrace so long had Reginald the best chance of being your heir? Reginald is not the man to practise heroic self-denial for the sake of abstract truth."

A few days later Lettice came back to her husband, and took up her position as his nurse, and after that his recovery was swift and complete. As Sir Robert had observed, happiness is far and away the best medicine.

"Darling," Denis said to her, as he drew the golden head down to his breast, "we will begin our married life all over again, and this time there will be no secret to come between us—no shadow to darken our trust. I have done wrong once in withholding my confidence from you, but I have suffered for it, and the lesson is one that will last me my life. 'Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.'"

But this is a version of the matter that Letty will not for one moment allow.

"Besides," she says, as she nestles closer to him, "why should we waste thought on the past, when the present has redeemed it?"

Which proves that, for once in her life at least, Letty was a philosopher.

[THE END.]

WHEN it is completed the great Siberian railway will be the longest in the world. Its extreme length will be 4,736 miles, or about twice as long as the Canadian-Pacific, and the total cost is estimated at £36,765,000. According to contract, it must be finished by 1900.

THE famous Oberammergau stone, which has a human face full of sorrow pictured by the hand of nature on its surface, has been characterized as one of the most curious freaks of nature that has been found. Pliny, about the beginning of the Christian era, mentioned an agate, the lines and markings of which formed a perfect picture of Apollo and the muses. The reproduction was so striking that little children recognized it at sight. Majolus, another writer of high standing, saw an agate in the collection of a jeweller in Venice that showed the perfect picture of a shepherd with crook in hand and a cloak thrown over his shoulders. The owner of this stone prized it highly, and refused large sums of money for it. In the Church of St. John, Pisa, Italy, there is a stone marked with red, blue, and yellow, the lines representing an old man with heavy beard, with a bell in his hand, seated beside a small stream. To the faithful it is known as the St. Anthony stone, because it is a fair likeness of that saint, even in the minor details of tunic and bell. "The one-legged John," another stone picture, is in the mosque of St. Sophia, in Constantinople. The picture is on a marble slab, and was found by quarrymen in Italy. It is perfect in every detail, except that the saint has but one leg and foot. A piece of ballast stone picked up by the Spanish Consul in Boston, Mass., showed two perfect human heads and faces, the hair and features being distinct, the natural portraits being much darker than the surrounding stone. Other instances of faces in stone might be cited, but this proves that the Oberammergau is not unparalleled.

It is not generally known that Juan Fernandez—the island on which Alexander Selkirk, the Robinson Crusoe of romance, lived for so many years—is at the present time inhabited. Two valleys, winding down from different directions, join a short distance back from the shore, and here now stands a little village of small huts scattered round a long, low, one-storied building, with a verandah running its whole length. In this house lives the man who rents the island from the Chilian Government, and the village is made up of a few German and Chilian families. The tiny town is called San Juan Baptista, and the crater-like arm of the sea on which it is situated, and where Alexander Selkirk first landed, is now called Cumberland Bay. The island is rented for about two hundred pounds a year. The rent is paid partly in dried fish. Catching and drying the many varieties of fish, and raising cattle and vegetables, wholly occupy the contented settlers, and much of their little income is obtained from the cattle and vegetables sold to passing vessels. The cattle need no care, and the vegetables almost grow wild. Turnips and radishes, first sown here by Selkirk himself, now grow rank and wild in the valleys like weeds. There is also a race of wild dogs, which completely overrun the island, depending for existence mainly upon seals. They are the descendants of a breed of dogs left by the Spaniards. At the back of the little town, in the first high cliff, is a row of caves of remarkable appearance, hewn into the sandstone. An unused path leads to them, and a short climb brings one to their dark mouths. About forty years ago the Chilian Government thought that a good way to be rid of its worst criminals would be to transport them to the island of Juan Fernandez. Here, under the direction of Chilian soldiers, these poor wretches were made to dig caves to live in. In 1854 they were taken back again, however, and the caves have since been slowly crumbling away. The narrow ridge where Selkirk watched is now called "The Saddle," because at either end of it a big rocky hummock rises like a pomme. On one of these is now a large tablet with inscriptions commemorating Alexander Selkirk's long and lonely stay on the island. It was placed there in 1868 by the officers of the British ship *Topaz*. A small excursion steamer now runs from Valparaiso to Juan Fernandez island. The round trip is made in six days, and three of these may be spent on the island in fishing and visiting those lonely but beautiful spots which, nearly two hundred years ago, were the haunts of Robinson Crusoe.

EVERY year there are three contests for the prize of beauty among the pretty girls of Vienna. The field is attended by the notables of the city, including foreign ambassadors. Every visitor, on paying a coin equivalent to about five pence, receives a ticket which entitles him to record one vote for the lady whom he deems the most beautiful. It used to be open to the fair ones to canvass for themselves, and many of the most enterprising would boldly address a stranger, and, with a winning smile, inquire whether he did not consider her worth a vote; whereupon he would gallantly offer his ticket. That practice has now been stopped, and the voters remain unprejudiced. The prize is worth striving for; it is as good as a dowry, and throws open the gates of matrimony to the crowned one. People from near and far throng to these contests. Several first-class military bands are performing all the afternoon on the mountain. Toys, gingerbread, indigestible eatables, flags and lanterns are offered for sale; all the ingredients of a regular fair—a Dutch kermesse—are scattered over the place in abundance; the whole ending in a brilliant display of fireworks at night. At about ten o'clock the ladies who have received the votes of their admirers enter the brilliantly lighted hall, where the members of the committee are seated, adorned with many coloured scarfs and badges. The girl approaches the table, gives her name and the number of votes she has received, in proof of which she delivers up the little coupons, and takes a numbered ticket from the committee. An hour later the results are read aloud and the first, second and third prize awarded. Then the three successful graces come forward, stand on an elevated platform, and show themselves to the public, from whom they receive a royal ovation; after which supper, beer-drinking, singing and harmless mirth bring the friendly contest to a close.

LEILA VANE'S BURDEN.

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CHAPTER XXV.

LEILA could hardly have told how she lived through that month that passed between the evening of Julian's return to Wavetone and the morning that saw her made his wife. She was as a matter of fact bewildered by the excitement and the way in which Mrs. Sylvester busied and bustled her about in the preparations for the ceremony.

Everything had become so changed with Leila since her betrothal, life was so different, so full of tender happiness, of golden hope, and a gladness which even the rust and weight of the old sorrow could not dim, that the girl unconsciously changed too. Her strong, self-willed independence dropped from her a little each day. Julian had a way of encouraging her dependence upon him instead, and with her heart yielding by degrees to the divine influence of her love, Leila found a joy in letting the strong, dear hands of her future husband fashion and arrange everything for her, instead of planning and thinking for herself as she had done for so long.

"I shall become fat very soon if I continue to be as lazy as I am now," Leila said now and then to Margot with that shy, pretty laugh of hers which had been born with her new found happiness.

"Lazy!" Margot cried once at this. It was a very hot July day; big and spacious as the Sylvester house in Belgrave-squares was, there seemed to be no air to breathe. The two girls were lying in muslin peignoirs in Leila's room with the blinds lowered to shut out the glare of the sun. "Lazy, my Leila! do you know that you stood for quite two hours this morning at Madame Reilly's? It made me ache only to look at you—you patient lamb!"

Leila laughed again.

"I am now to this sort of work, you know, Midget—but all the same it is very exhausting. I don't think I could endure too many visits to the dressmaker. I am certainly not patient enough for that!"

"You stood as I said just now like a lamb," Margot declared, and then she waxed enthusiastic, "and all Leila, if you could only imagine how lovely you look in that pale pink gown. Madame Reilly is enchanted with you—at last she has found a beautiful bride!"

"Everything is too grand for me," Leila said, shyly, hurrying Margot away from this open declaration of admiration.

"Nothing is grand enough, you mean!" was Margot's lofty reply; "please cultivate more self-importance, your future ladyship!"

It was a source of exquisite delight to Margot Sylvester that she found herself permitted to act to Leila now as she would have acted towards a sister of her own, had such a sister been circumstanted as Leila was.

Immediately Julian had announced his intention of an early marriage Margot had gone to her mother.

"I know just all that is in your heart, darling mother," she had said; "but I want you to let me speak instead of you. I feel somehow that Leila will not refuse my gift. She knows my love and she will understand how great is my desire to share even in such a little way in her happiness. There is that legacy I inherited from Grandmamma Daera. I intend if you approve, mother dear, to make it all over to Leila as my wedding gift."

Mrs. Sylvester had drawn her daughter to her heart with one of her rare moments of expressed tenderness.

"You only forestall me, Margot," she had said, gently, her lips caressing the bright auburn hair. "Leila is as dear to me in one sense as she is to you in another; her mother and myself were as attached to one another as you two children have been; the circumstances indeed of our two lives, Margot, have been strangely similar." Mrs. Sylvester's face was sad as she said this. "Pray Heaven such misery as came to poor Bertha through the man we both loved may never come to Leila in her marriage."

Margot had looked up into her mother's face at these words, then she had grown crimson, and had clung to those loving arms a moment longer. The silent sympathy of that embrace was very sweet to the girl; it was a sudden consolation to her to know that her strong, wise mother had trod the same path as she had now to tread, and had conquered her pain and lived down the yearning ache of her woman's heart.

Margot Sylvester's love for her mother was exquisitely tender and beautiful in such a moment.

The two women, the young and the elder, had rested in that warm embrace for a long moment of silence, then Mrs. Sylvester had taken up the subject of Leila in all her usual brisk fashion.

"I hope the child will do as you wish, Margot," she said; "somehow I don't think she will refuse your gift. She is a changed creature since Julian has come on the scene."

Leila did not refuse Margot's gift, it was quite impossible for her to deny her dear girl-friend such a tender wish, more especially as Margot approached the matter in so infinitely sweet, so delicate a manner.

The party had migrated back to London after a few more days at the sea, and once there Mrs. Sylvester had plunged Leila into her first experience of fashionable life, mingled with all the bustle and novelty of preparing for her wedding, which was so close at hand.

"Now, I am going to do just what I like with Leila. I know how to deal with her," Mrs. Sylvester had said, confidentially, to Julian. "I don't intend to let her have one single hour if I can prevent it in which she can sit down quietly and ponder over her position. I do not doubt her, poor child, Heaven forbid! but I understand her nature so well, and I don't want to give the past the very smallest chance of asserting itself. When you are married it will be your place to see to all this, you can let her be as quiet as you like then."

Julian had agreed to the wisdom of all this; nevertheless he had demurred a little plaintively against so many social engagements.

"I never got her to myself for ten minutes," he had declared. "Last night, for instance, at

that soiree she was simply surrounded; there was no approaching her!"

Mrs. Sylvester had laughed here.

"Poor Julian, it is a shame. Now you see the penalty of having fallen in love with a really beautiful woman!" Then she had grown grave. "Leila will be all your own now very soon, and if I make no mistake you will never have cause to fear the fascinations of society where she is concerned. She only goes out now because I insist upon her doing so. I want her brain to have all the fresh food possible. She has passed through so many experiences of late that she is almost dazed; but at any rate I prevent her from letting her thoughts wander to that scandal, or from dwelling upon those things which might and could be so destructive to your happiness. I want, don't you see, to let everything be bright, and at the same time to work off the shy, strange feeling which her secluded life has naturally made so strong. As your wife, Julian"—Mrs. Sylvester had finished—"Leila will have a prominent and important place in the world. You cannot remain shut up at Wilton Crobbie all your life, and I have been trying to give the child a hint of this fact, and a glimpse of the sort of world she will have to mingle with by-and-by. Her uncle, Lord Waversham, was as amazed as he was delighted with her when they came in contact the other day."

"Leila tells me she remembers seeing him as a tiny child," Julian had remarked in reply to this.

Mrs. Sylvester had nodded her head.

"Yes, in the early days of their marriage Bertha's brother used to see a good deal of the Eustace Vane, but when she died, and, indeed, a long time before that, the Waversham family had shaken off all intercourse with a man so utterly worthless as Eustace speedily proved himself to be, and Leila and her mother shared their father's fate."

"I think it was pretty cruel of Lord Waversham to have neglected his sister's child so many years—I feel almost inclined to tell him as much," Sir Julian had said rather hotly; but Mrs. Sylvester had hastened to correct him.

"I go with you entirely, Julian," she had said; "at the same time I am worldly wise in this matter—you must shut your eyes to a good deal in this life, you know, my dear. After all no one suffers the pinch of the shoe except the person who has to wear the shoe. I know for a fact that Waversham and his sister, Lady Cordelia, bore with Eustace Vane just as long as they possibly could simply for Lady Bertha's sake—and as you heard the other day, either of them would willingly have given Leila a home if she would have removed her father after her mother's death; so you must be generous, accept the friendship and relationship with both the Earl and Lady Cordelia. As to the Vane family, the less you have to do with them the better. They are all pretty much tarred with the same brush as Eustace; if they attempt to bother Leila you must send them about their business quickly."

Julian had smiled here quietly.

"No one shall attempt to annoy Leila," he had said, and he spoke gravely. "I mean my darling to have nothing but peace and contentment, and sunshine, so far as it is possible for a man to give these things. Do not be afraid, dear friend; please Heaven Leila's life shall run in very different lines to what has been the case all through her shadowed childhood!"

Mrs. Sylvester had nodded her head, and had been silent a moment or two, then she had spoken out in her frank characteristically brusque fashion,—

"I am quite sure of this, Julian; I know you well; had I not known you so well I should never have acted as I have done, never have urged this marriage upon Leila; but it is my absolute confidence in you that gives me the comfort, the satisfaction I have in picturing the child's future as your wife. I see nothing ahead, indeed (for we have fully decided on your attitude where Eustace Vane is concerned), that can be at all likely to trouble your life together. Nevertheless, I will be frank with you. I think it would

be far far wiser for you and Leila to begin your married life alone!"

Julian's dark face had flushed. These words had probed a difficulty which not even to his own heart had he as yet confessed might be a very great one. He could not blame Mrs. Sylvester for her plain words, nor could he for one instant gainsay the wisdom that prompted them, yet he was conscious of a pang as he heard this speech.

The old tender affection, the thought which he had bestowed for so long upon his mother had, perhaps (as was most natural) been less dominant in his mind since his betrothal, but they were not diminished in the very least. In truth at odd moments, and more especially at such a moment as this, when Mrs. Sylvester was speaking so plainly, so intimately on the subject of his new life, Julian was conscious of an added touch of tenderness when thought of his mother rose in his mind.

He had been so very gentle, so very sweet throughout the whole matter of the engagement and marriage, that her few first harsh words had been almost swept from his memory.

The knowledge of how nearly the beautiful but most weak woman had fallen a victim a second time in her life to the fascination of a wholly unscrupulous man would have been enough to strengthen the love and pity Julian had for his mother a hundredfold.

The suggestion that she should leave Wilton Crobbie and betake herself to another and a solitary home was one that Julian as a sensible man knew only too well ought to be made, and made without delay; but it was one that a son so good and so tender as he absolutely could not make.

He had had a vague hope that the suggestion would have come from his mother. He knew she was a proud woman, and he felt that she would shrink from living as a secondary person in a house where she had reigned as sovereign mistress of it all.

He had been surprised and a little disappointed as the days had passed that no such suggestion had come from Mrs. Bernadine, and the words Margot's mother spoke so very straightforwardly brought the first little grey cloud of difficulty over the glorious brightness of his new found happiness.

He had answered Mrs. Sylvester quietly.

"You are wise in everything, dear friend," he had said, "and in nothing are you more wise than in such a remark. You will, however, I think, appreciate the delicacy and the difficulty of my position perhaps better than most people, and you will understand therefore that if I take no active measures immediately to carry out what you suggest, it is only because I cannot. Circumstances have always been allowed to alter cases, you know." Julian had added with a faint smile, "and the circumstances that surround and have surrounded my mother's life are very, very far from being ordinary ones. The old scriptural advice as to a man leaving all the world and cleaving to his wife alone can be carried out in my case in a modified manner only."

Mrs. Sylvester had answered this very briefly.

"I am sorry to hear it, Julian," she had said, and he winced a little at the tone of her voice.

"Are you condemning me for trying to weave in memory of my mother with the joys, the anticipations of my married life?" he asked hurriedly.

"Condemn you I do. I am only too anxious that your joys should be joys. That is all."

"And you doubt my mother in this respect?" Sir Julian said, in a pained voice.

"To a certain extent, yes," was Mrs. Sylvester's frank reply, "but only to a certain extent. I have the greatest admiration for your beautiful mother, and for the charms and the womanliness which stand out revealed in her nature; but I can see her faults better than you can, Julian, and I am convinced that she would be happier, you would, be happier, and Leila would be far happier, if now that you are about to give a new mistress to Wilton Crobbie Mrs. Bernadine should determine on settling herself in a new home. There, I always speak out, you know, and I have told you of the only thing that seems to me could (as far as we know of life and its mysteries) arise as a difficulty and a barrier in

the road of your married happiness. I see exactly how you are placed, however." Mrs. Sylvester continued as the young man had remained silent, "and I honour you, Julian, for your tender thought for your mother's feelings; mothers' feelings are not so frequently honoured in this generation that your remembrance can be lightly dismissed. I will only hope that my imagination may have carried me a little too far in this matter, and that my wisdom may have been for once ill placed."

Sir Julian had given her a smile.

"I think my easiest move will be to establish a new home here in London and leave my mother where she has always been. Thank Heaven, my darling is not as other girls might be. Her young life, full of sorrow as it has been, has broadened Leila's mind enormously. The petty things that would arise in most young wives' thoughts will never have place with Leila. Already she is disposed to love and to comprehend my mother almost as well as I love and comprehend her. So there is comfort for me in that!"

"Yes," was Mrs. Sylvester's quick thought, "if your mother will allow you to find the comfort!" Out loud, however, she had said no more. Julian's stated intention to establish himself and his wife in London pleased her for a good many reasons; at the same time to such a woman as Margot's mother the selfishness and jealousy which was so clearly portrayed in Mrs. Bernadine's character, where her son was concerned, were both incomprehensible and contemptible.

"Thank Heaven, Leila is not as other girls," she had said to herself. "I anticipate some rocks ahead for her with Julian's foolish mother; but poor little Leila is so well used to rocks by now that I can reckon upon her to steer into clear water eventually. Her love for Julian has bent her great pride already. She will bear everything for this love."

And so no more was said about the future; but the days went by, and one lovely July morning there was a simple yet smart wedding at a fashionable church, and followed by Margot as her only bridesmaid, and led to the altar by her mother's brother, Lord Waverham, Leila Vane gave herself outwardly by *vows*, as she had given her whole pure beautiful heart, to Julian Bernadine to be his wife, his life's companion, his love.

There was not a large assembly of people. Cicely Sylvester was conspicuous by her absence. She had not deigned to show the faintest interest in Leila's engagement or wedding, but had sacrificed the joys of the season rather than share her mother's home while Leila was there. She could not forgive Julian Bernadine for his indifference to her pretty self, and if she had one definite feeling where Leila was concerned, it was a very clear and strong dislike not untainted with jealousy.

She called her mother and Margot many hard names, and prophesied a time when Leila's ingratitude should arise to pay them for all the foolish attention they had lavished on the girl. There were similar feelings, burning and searing Mrs. Bernadine's heart as she stood pale, beautiful and smiling in the church at her son's wedding, and thus Leila, all unconscious and innocent of giving pain or evil thought, started out on her marriage path followed by the jealousy of two foolish, vain and selfish women.

Happily she never dreamed of such things, and as she drove away in the sunshine with her hand clinging to her husband's arm, and the memory of Margot's loving embrace and blessing still surrounding her, Leila felt as though the old life must have been one long hideous dream, or that she had passed through some form of death, and was now re-born to taste joy and sweetness and life in its real meaning, and for the first time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THEY were abroad many weeks. It seemed to Leila as if they had travelled everywhere; she was swept on from one enchanted spot to

another. Her mind was dazzled by the innumerable pictures of Nature's beauty that were unfolded before her every day.

Each hour she lived now seemed to teach her something new. Her exquisite sense of enjoyment was a revelation of a refined intellectual mind to her husband.

Once he came upon her, high up on one of the Swiss mountains; she was sitting lost in thought. He was struck by the gravity, and pained by the sadness of her deep abstraction.

He touched her gently with his hand.

"What is it, my sweetheart?" he asked tenderly. He was fully prepared for a big mental reaction, for a brief return, at least, of that old tyrant trouble that had dominated her so long.

She turned at once, the colour flashing into her face as it always did when her eyes met his.

"Oh! Julian—I feel so small—so very very small!"

He laughed heartily.

"Comparing yourself with a mountain, my wife!"

She laughed too.

"No, I mean—I feel so small mentally, so poor—I never thought I could have been so ignorant—I ought to begin to try and write now, and oh! I used to be so proud of my writings once!"

Julian stretched himself beside her, and together they gazed over the wide smooth bosom of the lake, a sweep of emerald green water dividing them from the giant mountain beyond.

"It does awe one," he said involuntarily. "Everything is so still—so deep—so big. There is no place for anything small!"

"It makes my heart swell," Leila said, her voice trembling. "Julian, I believe if I lived in a world like this I could never, never have any thought in my heart that was not good."

He had hold of her little hand, and was kissing it softly; he smiled at her last words.

"Good!" he repeated, "are you going to tell me you have ever known a harsh or a bitter thought, you poor little dove, my angel!"

Leila coloured, then paled, then shivered.

"Alas!" she said, with absolute pain in her voice, "I have known many such!"

He could have called himself a fool for saying such words, he had brought a look to her face that had never been there since those old days of trouble.

He was quick to change the conversation, and in another few moments they were laughing and scrabbling down the rough path to the small hotel below, where they were staying for the moment.

May be Leila was as swift to read her husband's disturbed thought as he had been to catch that old cloud upon her face. Anyhow she fell into his mood, and they were soon back in the radiance, the golden warmth of their happiness.

Julian had told Mrs. Sylvester he should extend his wedding trip to two, or possibly three months, and in truth it was quite the end of September before he permitted himself to think of a return to England.

Mrs. Bernadine was back again at Wilton Crobbie before the news arrived that Sir Julian and his young wife were to return.

Many letters had passed between Leila and Margot. Sir Julian had written frequently to his mother, and she had sent an occasional reply, with, of course, a graceful remembrance to Lady Bernadine, but between Sir Julian's mother and his wife there was as wide a sense of unconquianthood as though they had never met. This, at least, was the feeling on Leila's part; Mrs. Bernadine's sentiments we know, unfortunately, were more defined, and not so promising.

Leila had now and then a passing sensation of fear as she thought of her husband's mother. "I hope she will like me; I hope she will let me love her!" she said once to Julian.

He was very brisk in his answer.

"My darling, why should there be any doubt in the matter?"

Leila smiled.

"I don't know why there should be any, but I am sometimes a little nervous. I used to

imagine Mrs. Bernadine did not like me. I dare say it was only imagination, but the feeling came once or twice when I was staying at Wilton Crobbie. I hope it was only imagination." Leila went on more earnestly, more hurriedly; "for oh, Julian, it would be a grief to me if I thought your mother was not happy about your marriage. She—she might so easily object, you—"

"Now, Leila," Julian said, determining to take time by the forelock. "I don't intend to let those sort of morbid, miserable ideas enter into your head, they will be a perpetual cloud over our happiness, darling, if they are not stamped out at once and for always. Don't begin to worry your dear little head about possibilities which will never be certainties. You are my wife—my beautiful wife, of whom I am so proud! To suggest even to me little things like you have just said is to do me an injury; and, if you please, I don't want an injury, but I do want a kiss—several kisses, in fact; and if you don't come and give them to me—well—"

Leila gave her kisses shyly, delicately, but she clung to him a little longer than usual.

"Is there anyone else like you in the whole world, Julian?" she asked, the passion in her heart escaping in her voice.

He laughed.

"I devoutly hope not, for, if so, I shall have you running after my other self, and I shall go mad with jealousy in consequence."

"What nonsense we talk," Leila said, with her pretty soft laugh. Then she looked up at him wistfully. "You could not be jealous, could you, Julian?" she said, half-lightly, half-gravely.

"Don't try me," he answered, and he was quite in earnest. "I have never known what jealousy was till I met you; now, I feel as if I could devour any human creature who so much as looks at you. Leila, you know you are much too beautiful to be an ordinary creature!"

He closed his lips with her hand.

"Now, let us be sensible and give orders for our departure."

They stayed a day or two in Paris, but the gay city was not at its best in September, and somehow a little veil of depression seemed to have fallen over the brightness of Leila's spirit. It was here that the first mention of her father's name passed her lips.

They were driving in the Champs Elysées and laughing and chatting merrily, when she gave a little exclamation that was almost a cry as a little fawn passed them.

Julian looked at her quickly, and she answered his look.

"I thought it was my father," she said in a low voice.

Julian turned and gazed after the little fawn. Then he shook his head.

"No, dearest; but the resemblance was certainly very strong."

They were silent for a long while. Julian gazed furtively and tenderly at her pale, quiet face.

"She must go through these moments, they are inevitable," he said to himself, but he felt inclined to cure the existence of Eustace Vane nevertheless.

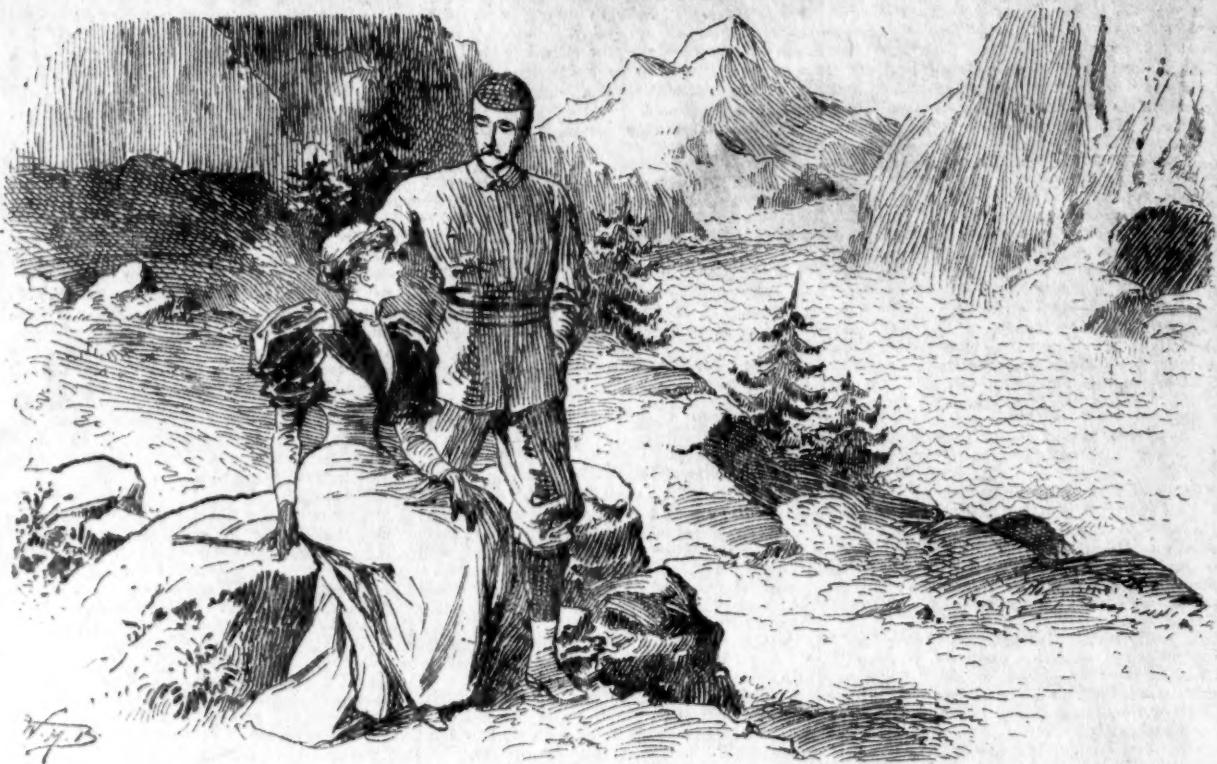
That evening after dinner he spoke openly to her.

"I want you to learn to bring all your troubles to me, my little wife," he said, tenderly. "You must even let me share your thoughts, if possible. Everything will seem less if we share it now. You are grieving about your father. You have not said anything, but I can see your heart in your eyes. Tell me just exactly what hurts you most at this moment."

"You are so good—so sweet," Leila said, and the tears rushed to her eyes. Then she went on in a low voice, "I cannot quite forget him, Julian, I—I loved him so much, I believed in him so long; and he was not *all* bad. I—I think he did care for me a little. I cannot bear to think; he may be ill, or in trouble when I am so happy; that he may want for something when I have so much. I grow cold when I imagine he may be ill and—"

Sir Julian soothed her gently.

"Leila, you must trust me absolutely. You know I am not a cruel man, nor a hard one. Your father shall never want; that I promise you, and



"WHAT IS IT, MY SWEETHEART?" JULIAN ASKED, TENDERLY.

if a time should come when he has real need of your care and your love I shall be the first person to take you to him. Till such times, however, my dear wife, it is for your happiness and for mine that your father does not share our life. I speak plainly, but—

"But I understand," Leila said in a quiet way, "and I know that you are right, Julian."

The next day they were *en route* for England, and a few hours later the household of Wilton Crobbie were in a state of excitement and ready to give a hearty welcome to the newly married couple on their arrival at their beautiful country home.

Mrs. Bernadine was in a sense a far cleverer woman than her son gave her credit of being. Her cleverness, however, lay in those subtle touches, those quiet, cunning little ways that are unfortunately attached to a feminine, and it must be said, a mean nature.

From the very first she had allowed her jealousy for Leila to become dislike. That had been in the days when she had only feared in her imagination; but from the very moment she realised that her fear had been well founded, and that Leila had triumphed over her (as she put it to herself, so foolishly!) her dislike ripened into positive hatred, and a hate, moreover, that would be satisfied with no negative condition.

She had spent the weeks of Julian's absence abroad in scheming and arranging how she could work her way into the life of these two young creatures.

She had no intention, no desire of losing her place in Julian's heart; indeed, when she realized that he was actually married, actually gone from her in a sense, she suffered an anguish of pain which was as true as it was bitter.

That she should have allowed such miserable, such unworthy feelings as dominated her where Leila was concerned, even to creep into her thoughts, was but a sign of the shallowness, the vanity and the folly which Julian had felt only

too sadly assured had been the means of making her married life such a failure.

Her love for Julian had by no means decreased; therefore by his imagined desertion of her she had most unwillingly resolved on spending the weeks after the wedding by herself, and bereft of the strong influence of Julian's presence she had gone from one morbid frame of mind to another, till at length, when her son and his wife returned, she had worked herself up into a fine hysterical condition, and was ripe for any folly, or indeed any wrong, so that such a wrong should be successful in robbing Leila of her husband's love and trust, and in giving back to her, the mother, the entire affection she once possessed. Naturally being clever, these unhappy desires were not so much as even suggested by Mrs. Bernadine by word or manner.

She was very gentle and kind and charming, she had brought tears to Leila's eyes by the way in which she had flown into her son's arms, and the girl was touched also by the kindness of the greeting bestowed on herself. Nevertheless many hours had not gone before Leila was conscious of an uneasiness, a sense of pain where Mrs. Bernadine was concerned. She would have found it extremely difficult to have explained or thoroughly qualified this sensation, it touched her in a vague sort of way, but it touched her directly all the same.

She had a sort of repugnance and self-reproach combined when she found herself alone with Julian's mother, who, on the following day, began making over to her all the authority of the big house where she had once been a humble, and she had almost feared at the time, an unwelcome guest. Leila felt her pride rising unconsciously at Mrs. Bernadine's manner.

She could not fully explain this either; Julian's mother was apparently very sweet in all she did, but there was a sting in her sweetness that the young wife could not fail to feel.

"I am very stupid," she said to herself, not once but a dozen times, in those two hours she spent alone with Mrs. Bernadine, and afterwards

when she was by herself in her own spacious room Leila took up her pen and started a letter to Margot. She had an answer to send to a long letter she had received in Paris.

The gist of Margot's letter had been all the same.

"Tell me you are happy, my Leila. Keep on telling it to me," she wrote; "never mind how many times you write it, it is always beautiful, always consoling to me—it is still so strange to me to realize that my dear, dear, dear Leila can write such words, and from the heart too!"

Leila gave a sigh as she found herself alone; Julian would be absent till dinner-time, he had gone on a visit round the estate. He had done this purposely to leave his wife and his mother together.

Leila read through Margot's letter again and again, and her smile had returned.

"I am happy, happy, happy," she began her answer, "but I shall not be quite happy till Margot comes to share my wonderful life for a time."

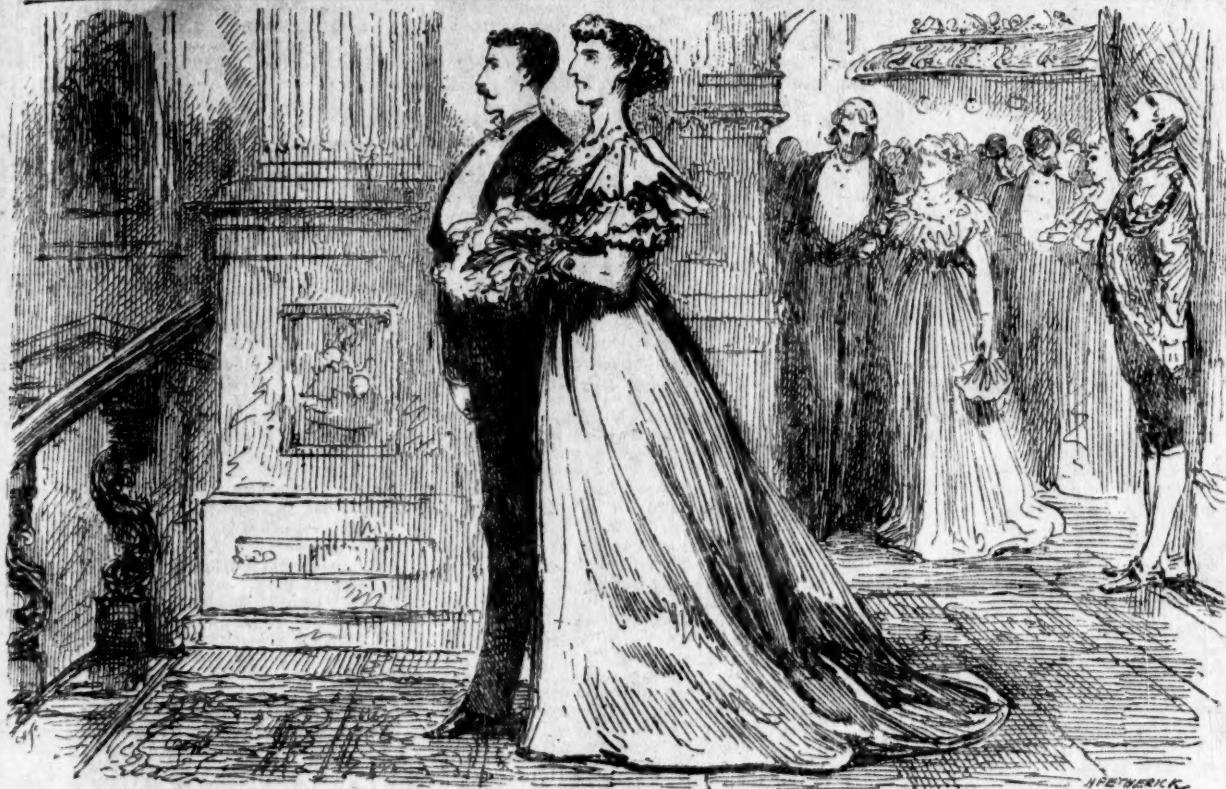
And then she had put down her pen quite suddenly.

"What is the matter with me?" she said to herself almost passionately. "I never felt as I feel now. I was never frightened even of the very worst in all the old trouble—but now," she broke off in her thoughts, and rising paced the room.

A sudden strong desire had come to her—a desire that her life could be lived away apart from that beautiful curious mother of Julian's, who was so sweet and yet gave her such discomfort.

In a moment or two Leila had conquered herself, and was back finishing her letter to Margot. If the wise good spirit that had lived so strongly in his young wife's heart could have been instilled, even in part, into his mother's turbulent and foolish mind the future life of Julian Bernadine would have been a brighter and a happier one than it was destined to be.

(To be continued.)



"THE DAUGHTER OF A HUNDRED EARLS!"

DR. DURHAM'S DAUGHTER.

—10—
CHAPTER XXIV.

"SIR GEORGE STOKE! Can it be really *you*?" exclaimed Margery Durham, in her great surprise at the apparition before her. "Why, I think you are about the very last person in the world I dreamed of encountering here to-night!"

"I expect so, Miss Margery," Sir George returned, in the old sheepish way, and with a faint smile. "But you see I always had a liking for Lynne—I mean of course, Edenbridge, as he has turned out to be—and when their invitation to this affair was forwarded to me, from Revelstoke, with other letters and things, I determined at once to run home and be present at it. I always liked Edenbridge, you know," he declared again frankly; "did not you, Miss Margery?"

Margery bent low her rose-crowned head. She buried her lips softly in that bouquet of cream and crimson roses.

"Yes," she answered gently. And at the moment could say no more.

"You will have this dance with me, won't you?" begged Sir George, eagerly, then; "that is to say, of course, if you are not already engaged for it, Miss Margery,"—taking possession of her card as he spoke, and scrawling his initials thereon two or three times.

"Oh no, I am not engaged, and I will dance it with you with pleasure," replied Margery, with alacrity; and stood up forthwith, thankfully and cheerfully.

She noticed as they moved away together that Sir George was much altered; that, though his shock of fair hair—his "corn-coloured locks," as Mrs. Kildare used playfully to call them—was as thick and as rough as ever, his eyes were wild and blood-shot, and drawn at the corners into ugly lines.

He had been striving hard to forget the past, and Yolande Kildare, in a godless pandemonium of dissipated pleasures, poor foolish young man!

and the crow's feet were left behind to tell of the fruitless struggle.

"Well, Sir George, and where have you been hiding yourself from us all this long while?" Margery inquired kindly, hoping that a friendly chat might cheer him up; for indeed he looked woebegone enough.

"Oh, Paris, Homburg—Vienna—anywhere," he answered moodily. "No place like Paris, you know, to forget one's troubles in; that is, if you know your way about. Miss Margery," dropping his voice and speaking near her ear, "is she here, can you tell me—is she expected? I have not seen her yet, myself. Have you?"

Margery Durham shook her head in silence, well knowing to whom he was alluding.

And even as she answered him thus mutely there was heard the low-pitched questioning buzz of many voices, a lingering long-drawn murmur of astonishment and admiration, round about the ball-room entrance, where several men were congregated with Viscount Edenbridge, as Mrs. Kildare and Yolande appeared on the threshold together. It was clear, indisputable, then, to everyone present that the queen of the revels had arrived at last.

Had there been any uncertainty hitherto upon the point in question none whatever now could any longer exist.

Mrs. Kildare's fair daughter, in her supreme loveliness and perfect toilette, had eclipsed, surpassed them all, they felt, just as "our lady in the summer sky" outshines and dwarfs the stars around her.

Yolande's dress to-night was black, composed entirely of the most exquisite black cobweb-fine lace, which draped and clung to her faultless shape with a grace seen rarely in English womanhood.

In dazzling contrast with the cloudy, sombre lace were the beauty and the whiteness of her marble neck and arms, wherein soft pearls, those emblems of calamity, gleamed and glistened or

shone subduedly, like tears that are shed by the light of the moon.

Vivid scarlet flowers—someone suggested they might be passion flowers, but Margery Durham herself knew not what they were—were woven into that pale crown of dead-gold hair; vivid scarlet flowers lay upon her bosom, just touching the warm whiteness thereof like blood upon driven snow.

"Thou source of all my bliss and all my woe!" Sir George Stoke, looking at her, quoted almost mechanically, his brows contracted, his teeth set. "I read that in some poetry book or other years ago, Miss Margery. Good gracious!" sighed he dolorously, a moment afterwards, "how lovely, how very lovely she is! Why was she made so false and so fair!"

An air of quiet triumph marked to-night the bored listlessness of her usual mien; her beautiful eyes shone with the exultation it was beyond her power to subdue in them.

How could she help it, knowing well, as she did, that her beauty was not to be approached by that of any one of the many fair women present—that she and she alone was indubitably Queen of the Night!

Margery thought of the faces divinely fair that she had read about or heard of at different times—of Helen of Troy, of Cleopatra, the famous Eloise, Gabrielle d'Estrees, Marie Stuart, Boccaccio's beloved "Fiammetta" of the blonde hair and indefinitely beautiful eyes, of others equally lovely and historic in their loveliness; but was any one of them in the glory of her lifetime, Margery wondered, with something curiously like a pang of envy, as beautiful as Yolande Kildare?

Mrs. Kildare herself, in rich *moiré antique* of a salmon-pink shade—she affected *moiré antique*—and with a pink and white aigrette in her hair, was looking as youthful, as languishing, as would-be fascinating as ever, scattering those fitful, brilliant smiles of hers whithersoever she moved, coqueting with any man, young, middle-aged, or

old, who might be weak and silly enough to respond to her humour of the moment.

Suddenly the music crashed out exhilaratingly; Sir George Stoke, recalled to his senses and his surroundings, grasped spasmodically the waist of Margery, and the Kildares for a time were lost in the crowd.

By-and-by when that dance was over, with several in addition to it for which Margery Durham had been claimed, and she was sitting in a cool ante-chamber, demolishing gratefully the ice and wafers which her latest partner had just brought thither to her, Lady Anne Guest discovered the girl and promptly took possession of the vacant seat next to her—that indeed of Margery's cavalier.

For no having done his duty by her had now departed to do the same for himself.

"Well, dear child!" Lady Anne said, in her tender way, laying her slim jewelled hand over Margery's, "are you enjoying yourself very much? I hope so, and that plenty of partners are forthcoming. Both your father and your aunt have deserted you, I fear. I saw the pair of them not a minute ago in the card-room," added Lady Anne, with her soft little laugh.

"It matters not in the least, dear Lady Anne," Margery assured her. "They know that I can very well take care of myself when I am here; and—and since my card is full," she almost faltered, with a regret that mastered her in spite of herself, "I shall not be allowed to feel lonely, you see."

"And so your card is filled up, then, Margery!"

"Nearly so, Lady Anne, I mean."

Yes, thus indeed it was! Margery Durham's card was nearly filled; and yet there remained away someone for whose coming she had waited and watched in vain!

Yes, even so for Margery, and the golden hours were vanishing upon winged feet!

The young girl's waudering glance was arrested just then, albeit absent and idly enough, by a magnificent diamond pendant scintillating amid the lace upon the bosom of Lady Anne Guest.

"How very beautiful it is!" she said, involuntarily.

"This, do you mean, my dear?" answered the Earl's sister. "Yes, they are very valuable, and have been in our family for centuries, first set in one fashion, then reset in another, until they find themselves in their present state."

"I wore the whole of them when I was presented; and they were greatly admired, I assure you, Margery."

"The Beaumanoir diamonds created quite a sensation at that Drawing Room which I attended—ah many years ago!—and I have no doubt that they will do the same thing again some day; and possibly before very long."

"For," added Lady Anne Guest, now with a quaint, pensive little smile, "I shall never wear any of the Beaumanoir diamonds after to-night—this is indeed the last occasion for me."

"The next time the jewels see the light, I trust it will be on the person of my nephew's wife."

"Lord Edenbridge's wife? Of course! I—I suppose so," murmured Margery Durham vaguely, feeling somehow all the while that Lady Anne's gentle eyes were resting on her rather shrewdly, and that it was necessary to say something, no matter how irrelevant, in reply.

Exactly at that moment, as it happened, Yolande Kildare, leaning on the arm of Viscount Edenbridge, passed through the ante-chamber within a yard or so of Lady Anne and Margery.

The couple had evidently been dancing together; the music in the neighbouring ball-room had just ceased.

Yolande was talking listlessly; but lifting shining eloquent eyes to the young man's face the while; and he carried her fan in his hand.

Lady Anne Guest, who was telling Margery—though the girl scarcely heard her—that her brother, the Earl, was resting for a time in his own room, in order that he might be able to show himself at supper by-and-by, frowned unmistakably on seeing these two in company together.

Clearly Yolande Kildare was not the woman upon whose person the Earl's sister would like to

see flashing the famed Beaumanoir diamonds that she had worn herself so notably in her own vanished youth.

In the next minute Lord Edenbridge had halted and turned, and was holding out his hand for Margery's card.

Yolande, ever in request, had been claimed by someone else; and now Lord Edenbridge was alone and at liberty.

"Would you credit it, Aunt Anne," he said, scribbling leisurely on Margery's programme as he spoke, "I am only just free—positively only just free! Old Lady Verinder and her granddaughters have arrived at last. They have had a thirteen miles' drive, you know, from Flockhampton, and now there is really no one else to trouble oneself about—"

"Ah, yes, my dear Edenbridge," Lady Anne put in dryly, "I, too, have seen and welcomed Lady Verinder and her grand-daughters. You, I think, have been dancing with Miss Kildare, have you not?"

"Yes," he answered, frankly, unmoved, not by any means in excuse of the circumstance, but merely in natural explanation of the same, as he restored to Margery her programme, at the same time preferring his arm for her acceptance—"yes, I chanced to fall in with Mrs. Kildare ten minutes or so ago—in fact, I was on my way hither to find Miss Durham; and then almost before I knew what I was about, I found myself dancing with Mrs. Kildare's daughter."

"Really, Aunt Anne," he broke off, half-laughing, half- vexed, "I cannot tell you precisely how it happened; but you know Mrs. Kildare of old, do you not?"

"Oh yes, my dear Yulph," Lady Anne replied, in the same dry manner, rising as she spoke; "I know Mrs. Kildare very well—I fancy, indeed, I know them both. Now I am going up to your father, for I am afraid that he is very tired. Perhaps a little soup or a few oysters would be the best thing for him at present. I will go and inquire of Dr. Durham."

She nodded, smiled, and then disappeared in the multitude which was thronging once more towards the ball-room; whether Lord Edenbridge and Margery likewise, with difficulty, now made their way.

"And so I was only just in time, it appears," he was saying, as they moved onward. "Had I not arrived opportunely on the scene when I did I should have lost this dance, I suppose, in all probability, and the after-supper one as well. Unless—unless," speaking very low near her ear, "those two unappropriated dances were reserved for me? Tell me," he said—"was it so?"

"No," answered Margery, truthfully; "they were not reserved for you; they were for anybody—the first comer. How could I know, Lord Edenbridge, whether you—whether you would ask me to dance even once?" she added, gently.

"Was it likely that I should forget you, or you me? Tell me that," he rejoined a little sternly.

Margery, however, would confess nothing further now; but, with drooped head and burning cheeks, she pressed her lips down once more upon the now fading petals of her precious bouquet of roses.

She had not yet thanked him for it, she remembered all at once contritely.

"You might have known," he went on tranquilly, "you might have understood that I should expect you to keep at least one or two open for me on your card. It would have been no easy matter to forgive you if I had come and found myself denied in the end."

"I had no right to look for your coming, Lord Edenbridge," said Margery, in her turn, a little proudly now.

And then she thanked him quietly for his beautiful floral gift.

"And this, then," indicating her gown, "is the bright-yellow trimmed with poppy-red—eh? Well, I must confess," said he quizzically, "that the two outrageous colours go remarkably well in harness. The blend in the abstract sounded rather appalling—that was all."

"It was only a very poor little joke of mine, I know," said Margery humbly. "Forgive it."

"At all events," he returned, laughing, "I

think I contrived not to be so very much misled by your exaggerated description, Miss Durham. I flatter myself that those roses would go equally well with the actual bright-yellow and poppy-red you told me about—now would they not?"

Before Margery could reply she found herself in the ball-room again, where the sprightliest of new polkas had just struck up.

Polkas, with their infectious lilt, were at that date greatly in vogue, and were always a popular dance at balls and assemblies.

Everyone danced them; sometimes, indeed, both the old and the young people.

So Yulph, Viscount Edenbridge, having placed his arm around the waist of Margery Durham, away went they in perfect step together.

Ah, happy, happy night! No longer need Margery apprehend in her heart that the ball would be a failure for her!

"Let us compare notes—shall we?" suggested Lord Edenbridge, when the lifting music had ceased and they stopped to regain breath. "Whom are you to be taken into supper by? Is he a knight you approve, or otherwise, Miss Durham? Come, let me hear."

"Yes, he is an old friend, and I like him very much," answered Margery gaily.

"Well," somewhat impatiently, "who is he?"

"He is Sir George Stoke," she said.

"Oh, he? Well, I am glad, Miss Durham, that you are taking compassion on him, because he seems rather inclined to mope and be unattractive. Was it not good of him to journey home to England solely on my account?"

"Yes, very good. I like him for it. And whom are you taking in, Lord Edenbridge?" Margery ventured to inquire.

"Guess," was all he answered, smiling.

"Yolande Kildare, perhaps," Margery was reckless enough to rejoin, on the irresistible impulse of the moment. And then longed to retract the name the instant it had escaped her lips.

Lord Edenbridge regarded her steadily with a world of reproach in his level gaze.

"Surely you must have forgotten," he told her coldly, "the confidence I once reposed in you, Miss Durham, one evening last autumn when we were together in that dear old orchard of yours at home in Foxdale—or never would you have made so impossible a guess."

Tears of passionate contrition for her folly were very near to overflowing in the eyes of Margery just then; when fortunately they came face to face with Sir George Stoke himself.

"This is our supper-dance, I believe, Miss Margery!" said he sheepishly.

And so Lord Edenbridge resigned her with a bow, and the Baronet took Margery away.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARGERY'S next reminiscences of the ball at Foxdale Castle are of the magnificent supper-room, the great dining-room, in fact, which had not been tenanted for years, and in which there was found sufficient space, with careful and judicious arrangement, for the whole of that night's company to be seated simultaneously.

In times gone by, when Foxdale Castle was young, that splendid baronial dark-walled apartment had been known as the banqueting-hall of the mansion, at whose carved oaken board our wretched first James Stuart had once upon a day been seated in royal state, lolling, like the contemptible old pagan that he was, upon the neck of the handsome worthless Villiers—the sombre portrait-lined chamber in which Charles I. had afterwards sat and mused with foreboding, melancholy eyes, and Charles II. had drunk and rioted with favourites of evil fame—the noble banqueting-hall beneath whose high groined roof, in times later on, the haughty Sarah of Marlborough and phlegmatic Queen Anne, the "Mrs. Freeman" and the "Mrs. Morley" of a romantic friendship, had dined together on the occasion of a brief visit to the ever-loyal family of Guest and Beaumanoir, whilst waiting anxiously for news delayed of the splendid hero of Ramillies in the midst of the strife abroad.

And the years had rolled on, and change had followed change, and now a modern Earl, albeit with one foot in the grave, sat there, the feeble head of it, at that "festive board."

Upon Lord Beaumanoir's right hand—for such was his sick fancy to-night—was his own beloved son; who ere another year should have run its course, would be reigning there at the Castle in his father's stead!

In the far distance Margery could just see Lady Anne, under the care of her own dear father—Dr. Durham—facing her nephew and her brother, a proud, serene, contented light in her tender, smiling eyes.

The silver dishes, the tall *sprynes*, the fruit, the flowers, the sparkling wine, the myriad softly-gleaming lights; the crowd of living faces, their smiles, their laughter, their animated glances; the shadowy pictured faces along the walls; even the "fleet and velvet-footed serving-men" behind their chairs—ay, yes, the whole bright vision, the faded dream now, comes back at will to Margery Durham, as faithfully and as distinctly as though it were all a scene of yesterday only, and her youth had returned once more!

As chance had willed it, on the left of Sir George Stoke sat no less a person than Mrs. Kildare herself.

But Mrs. Kildare was the last woman in the world to manifest the least embarrassment in a situation of the kind.

Indeed, she laughed and chatted with poor moody Sir George as volubly and as vivaciously as ever, as though he had suffered no injury at the hands of Yolande—in brief, as though they were the best of friends still, and he their constant visitor at the Grange.

She lavished upon the young man her most irresistible air; she displayed all her teeth; she called him *cher ami* before everyone; she even—

But, laugh! thought Margery at the spectacle—she had long ago ceased to marvel at the audacity and the versatility of Mrs. Kildare.

Yolande herself had fallen to the portion of some admiring stranger, Margery believed—but the doctor's daughter could not see her.

Aunt Susan and the Rev. Timothy Price, Margery Durham was relieved to notice, too, were likewise far removed from the neighbourhood of Sir George Stoke and herself; for the spirits of the two old friends over their reunion were waxing high that night, and sedate folks glanced at them disapprovingly.

It was old Lady Verrinder, the grandest dame of the company—

"The daughter of a hundred ears."

—who had led the way upright as a dart, upon the arm of Lulph, Viscount Edenbridge, from the heated ball-room to the cool, banqueting hall; and there she sat now in the place of honour, bending forward graciously to speak to the sick Earl, big opals flashing flame upon her withered, stork-like neck, the pride of her race discernible in the very curve of her fierce aquiline nose.

Need it be recorded that Margery was wholly content, perhaps more than satisfied in the circumstances, to behold the aristocratic Lady Verrinder installed where she was?

Not one jot, now, grudged she the ancient dame the recognised privilege of her exalted rank.

And the hour of revelry wore on. Then presently came a stir, a hush, a flutter of fans.

The glass of every guest present was replenished as if by magic.

Someone—it was an old, old friend of the Earl of Beaumanoir, Margery heard afterwards—had risen to his feet, and was going to make a speech.

What he actually said Margery Durham, now, can no longer remember; it was something, however, about a "fine old-fashioned and thoroughly British custom that should not—nay *must* not—be allowed to pass unhonoured, especially on an occasion so memorable, so eventful as the present."

This old friend of the Earl's spoke well, briefly, and to the point.

The men, for the most part, listened attentively; whilst one or two of the more emotional among the women cried a little behind their fans—Mrs. Kildare herself, of course, putting a few square inches of lace cautiously to her eyes—for an allusion, pathetic in its simplicity, was made to the finding of the long-lost heir.

They all drank, then, just as if each one present there did not feel the utter mockery of the act, to the health and long life of Lord Beaumanoir himself—to the health, happiness, and long life, but with no sad sense of hypocrisy now, of Yolande, Lord Edenbridge, his son; who, rising and standing erect, tall, proud, and god-like in his beautiful youth, acknowledged in a few, well-chosen sentences the toasts which had been proposed, cordially thanking his father's guests on behalf of that father and himself as well.

And by-and-by, when there was nothing more to wait for or to linger over, there was a general move and exodus again; and soon they had all returned to the ball-room—like giants and giantesses refreshed, as Mrs. Kildare whispered in the ear of Margery Durham—there to foot it once more as gaily and as unrearied as ever, whilst the black, cold night outside was rolling slowly from off the face of the earth, and the winter dawn breaking wan and chill through the fragments of sable cloud which the darkness had left behind.

So—

"Away, like children delighted,
All things forgotten beside, they gave themselves to
the maddening
Whirl of the dizzy dance, as it swept and swayed to
the music,
Dream-like, with beaming eyes and the rush of fluttering garments."

—just as though indeed the mirth and frolic were only then beginning, and not drawing nigh to their close!

There, alas! as Margery saw, was Aunt Susan, hoops and all, her partner actually the Rev. Timothy Price, in the very thick of a regular romp—the "Mazeppa Galop" of all things in the world—causing a sort of pain wherever they showed themselves, and creating not a little diversion for those who were looking on.

Margery and her partner had stopped for a while when Yolande Kildare, her hand now resting on the arm of the youthful Lord Verrinder, passed down the ball-room in that striking toilette of hers.

"She's the loveliest woman of her day, bar none," a masculine voice was saying close to Margery Durham. "It is to be hoped that Verrinder is capable of taking care of himself."

Where is the boy's grandmother, I wonder?

He ought to be at home and in bed.

The end of this fragmentary speech was drowned in the din of the band, and Margery heard no more.

But she could not help marking that Yolande looked bored to death, and that no particle of colour, now, lingered in the beautiful tired white face.

She was sick of the whole scene. It was as dust and ashes to her palate—all had grown as bitter to her as Dead Sea fruit!

And why? Ah, that was not difficult to conjecture for one who, like Margery, knew her secret and could read between the lines.

Presently arrived the time for Margery Durham's second dance with Viscount Edenbridge.

When it was over her father met them.

People were leaving fast, Dr. Durham said, and it was time that they also should be moving homeward.

Since supper the Earl had not been visible, and Lady Anne herself, fagged and worn out, had lately disappeared from the still bright rooms—Edenbridge remained there, she knew.

And her father had spoken truly, Margery owned with a regretful sigh—virtually the ball was over, and it was time that they were all going home.

In the crowded hall they discovered Aunt Susan, cloaked and hooded, and waiting for the rest of her party; Mr. Price, at her bidding, having skipped out bareheaded to hasten the movements of their bewildered flyman.

"When all this festivity and merry-making are at an end," Lord Edenbridge was saying gently to Margery, as he carefully wrapped her fury white cloak around her, "I mean to find time to come and see you at the old house, the dear old house, in Foxdale. Probably next week. Shall I be welcome?"

Her eyes answered him. She did not, could not, perhaps, speak just then.

"Margery, you will expect me—wait for me, dear—will you not?" he said, very earnestly, but low.

She was trembling from head to foot. She seemed to be forgetting where she was.

Then with an effort she managed to answer him. "Yes, I will expect you. I will wait for you," she said.

Swiftly raising her hand to his lips, he whispered—"Then goodbye, Margery—and remember!"

"Dr. Durham's carriage stops the way!" a footman shouted at that moment; and at last with patience and perseverance they managed to get themselves clear of the crush, and went rattling off Foxdale-ward as fast as they could go.

"Well," observed Aunt Susan, heaving a loud sigh, "I have enjoyed myself, and no mistake! I have had two or three good round dances with Mr. Price, who hasn't forgotten his steps, and indeed, John, I may say that on the whole I have enjoyed myself tremendously."

"That is all right, then, Susan," said Dr. Durham, heartily. "And you, Margery?" he asked, turning affectionately to his daughter.

Margery's heart was so strangely full she could scarcely make any reply.

She longed to throw herself into her father's arms and to weep out her burthen of happiness there.

"I, daddy!" she said, incoherently, at length, seeking and finding his hand in the darkness of the fly and squeezing it close to her side; "why, I have enjoyed it all so much—so much—that I would not go through it again, no, not for all the world, for fear the second time should be different from the first, and last things should happen, you know, which were not there to-night, and other things which were there to-night should not come over again. Oh, daddy dear, do you not understand?" she laughed rather brokenly—"for I hardly do myself!"

Her father shook his head.

Had there only been sufficient light to see, his look of perplexity, Margery knew, would have been comic enough.

"Humph!" commented Dr. Durham, "I am afraid that I don't, either, my dear."

"Goodness me," here Aunt Susan put in again, beginning to rub her knees, "how stiff my poor joints are, to be sure! But there, we have had our fling, as the saying goes, and now we must pay the piper!"

The gala-days were over at Foxdale Castle.

The dancing and the jukating and the health-drinking, for both high and low, rich and poor alike, were already things of the past.

People had not yet ceased to talk of it all, though; that, doubtless, in Foxdale, would go on for many a day to come.

Just a week had slipped away since the grand night of the Earl's ball; and now another eventful Tuesday—so it turned out—had dawned for Margery and her home.

Viscount Edenbridge, so the doctor had brought home word to his daughter on the foregoing day, was coming on that Tuesday afternoon to pay Margery his promised call at the "dear old house in Foxdale."

Whither now were flown her hours of sadness, her sleepless nights, her days of pain?

Whither now had vanished her haunting fear of those "delicate conspirators"—Yolande Kildare and her scheming, worldly mother?

So the clouds overhead were breaking at last, and the sun, full of glorious promise, must be hidden behind them somewhere, Margery knew.

At three o'clock Margery Durham went into the great parlour, her hair smooth, her gown neat, there to await the coming of Lord Beaumanoir's son.

Aunt Susan Patchett, clogged and red cloaked,

was out shopping in the village—the old house was very still.

When he—Lyulph, Lord Edenbridge—came in by-and-by, Margery was standing within the embrasure of one of the deep bow-windows, looking out with dreamy gaze upon the moist brown flower-beds, the dripping mulberry-trees, the dark hillocks of sodden grass on the lawn.

A thaw had set in during the past day or two, and the frost was going rapidly.

Margery did not turn her head until she knew that he was at her side—somehow she felt that she could not.

Then, as well and collectedly as her fluttering heart would allow her, she spoke her words of greeting and gave him her trembling little hand.

"You were waiting for me, then?" he said, his questioning eyes searching her averted face.

"Yes, I was waiting for you," she answered him, her voice very tremulous and low. "I—I expected you, you see. It is—it is good of you, Lord Edenbridge, to come to see me here at home."

There was a moment's silence.

Was he smiling?

Margery was not sure, but she fancied so.

"Why surely," said he, "you can guess my errand hither!"

Shivering a little then, Margery sank down weakly upon a low chair in the window—and covered her face involuntarily with her hands.

Lord Edenbridge, seating himself near, leaned towards her.

"Can you not, Margery?" he whispered.

And then he placed one arm firmly about her as they sat there together, and told her that errand of his without more ado.

"Margery, I have loved you long and truly," he said. "Look up now, my dearest, and give me the answer I am come for."

Her bosom was heaving painfully, her very heart ached, the tears had gathered thickly and stood in her sweet, troubled eyes.

At length she sobbed out,—

"I am not worthy—I am not in the least worthy of a love so noble as yours!"

"Not worthy!" he echoed incredulously. "Not worthy, Margery! You!"

"Ah, no, no!" she answered incoherently. "Lord Edenbridge, I will tell you something—listen for a moment to me."

"My dear one," interposed her lover gravely, "if you are now foolish enough to imagine for an instant that my father and his sister—Aunt Anne, you know—do not approve my choice, and would have me look elsewhere than at the old house in Foxdale for a wife, you are indeed mistaken grievously, are distressing yourself most needlessly, believe me.

"I have the loving good wishes of them both in the matter of this wise choice of mine; and both of them, moreover, are waiting to tell you so at the Castle.

"As for your own father, Margery, he has known—"

But Margery made a pitiful gesture of dumb protest and dissent.

Then she wrung her little hands together in a weary, hopeless sort of way; but all speech at present refused to come to her aid.

(To be continued.)

COINS suffer much loss in weight by abrading each other's surfaces when jingling in the pocket, and they are damaged each time a shopman rings them on his table to see whether they are genuine or not. Every minute particle of matter removed in these or other ways lessens the weight of the coins, and makes them look old. Some years ago a number of precise experiments were made, when it was ascertained that £100 worth of sovereigns lost £3 9s. 8d. of their value in a hundred years; similarly £100 worth of half-crowns lost £13 11s. 8d.; £100 worth of shillings, £36 14s. 4d.; and £100 worth of sixpences lost £50 18s. 9d. in value, or more than one-half in the hundred years.

HELEN'S DILEMMA.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR RUPERT drove straight to Victoria, and was just in time to catch a train; and about half-past seven o'clock he was walking up the avenue at Kingscourt at a rapid pace, and with an expression of stern, unwavering resolution on his moonlit countenance.

As he had travelled swiftly down, the only occupant of a first-class carriage, he had had leisure to coolly review and weigh the evidence of his senses; he had come to the calm, deliberate, unalterable conclusion—Helen was a wily impostor, a marvellously-beautiful and finished actress, and he had been her miserable dupe.

* * * * *

In the meanwhile Miss Brown, little dreaming of the storm that was about to burst over her unprotected head, was deeply engrossed in a game of bésique with Katie and Loo-Loo, and was losing heavily, as usual, and with her usual unfailing good humour.

"A sequence!" cried Loo-Loo, laying down her five cards with no small triumph, "and a royal marriage," clapping her hands. "That makes three hundred," she added, drawing one of the markers towards her with eager fingers. "And what have you got, Miss Brown?"

"Only four queens," returned Helen, humbly.

"Only four queens," she echoed contemptuously. "Why, I am nearly up, and you are not half way. I never say anyone with such wretched luck at cards as you have."

"Never mind, Helen," said Katie. "You are the more likely to have luck in something else," she added, with a significant smile that brought the roses to Helen's cheeks.

The blush had hardly died away when the door opened, and one of the footmen announced with impressive gravity,—

"Sir Rupert Lynn—in the blue drawing room—to see—Miss Brown."

He added the name in a tone of solemn disapproval and dignified protest.

"To see you!" exclaimed Loo-Loo, gaping at her governess with open-mouthed amazement, recklessly laying her cards down, face upwards.

"What on earth for? What can he want with you?"

"Never mind, Loo-Loo! Some message from father, very likely. Run along Helen. Don't keep him waiting," said Katie, with unusual animation. "There! you'll do very nicely; your hair is all right; you look lovely! Go."

Helen needed no second bidding, nor any urgent pressing. With beating heart she sped downstairs, turned the handle of the drawing-room door, and in another second found herself face to face with Rupert.

But her eager greeting died on her lips, the smile faded from her eyes when she beheld his stern grave demeanour, his frigid bow, and heard his icy—"How do you do, Miss Brown?"

"What has brought you here so suddenly?" she inquired, with much amazement. "I am so glad to see you!" she added, with a blush. "But oh, Rupert, what is the matter? You do not seem glad to see me," she exclaimed, with quivering lips and a sudden change of countenance.

"The change in my manner you will readily account for when I mention that I saw 'Teddy' to-day," returned Sir Rupert, calmly.

"Teddy!" she repeated in a tone of vague bewilderment. "Won't you sit down?" motioning him to a chair. "And who is Teddy?" she asked with a playful smile.

"I have heard that it is a wise infant that knows his own father, but I never yet came across a mother that did not recognize her child," he returned impressively.

"What do you mean? Explain yourself. You are talking in riddles," said Helen, hastily. "Tell me what you mean—at once?"

"I mean that Teddy is your son, Mrs. Bland," he replied emphatically. "Perhaps—with

scathing irony—"you never heard the name of Bland before!"

"Never till this instant," returned Helen, very forcibly.

"Nor of Colonel Bland?" he asked, with an odd smile.

"Nor of Colonel Bland," she responded, with slow, distinct utterance.

A pause ensued of quite two minutes' duration during which the ticking of the clock, and the flaring of the gas were the only audible sounds. At length Sir Rupert said, in a cool, level tone of dispassionate conviction,—

"You have mistaken your vocation. You would have made your fortune on the stage. You can stand before me in a strong light, and repudiate husband and child in one breath, without moving a muscle of your face! Mrs. Bland—"

"I am not Mrs. Bland," cried Helen, with a little stamp of her foot. "I never heard of the woman in my life—never. Do not dare to call me by her name again," she concluded, with a lightning flash from her dark blue eyes.

"Then, if it is not requiring too much, may I ask your real name?" demanded her companion with ironical politeness.

"My name is what it has always been—Helen Brown. I think you might have remembered it," she returned scornfully; "but you seem to have quite taken leave of your reason to-night—quite!"

"Have I! I wish to Heaven I could think so," retorted Sir Rupert, gravely. "I wish the link of evidence were not so strong—the evidence of my own senses."

"To what does this wonderful evidence point?" inquired Helen sarcastically. "A keeper for you?"

"To the fact that you, Mrs. Bland—yes—in answer to her gesture of indignation—"you, Mrs. Bland, lived unhappily with your husband at hill-station in India and went in bodily fear of your life in consequence of his outbreaks of violence; and, to place it beyond his reach, you despatched your child, Teddy, an infant, to England, in charge of a soldier's wife, a Mrs. Glass. Ah," noting her rising colour, "I see that name, at least, is familiar to you. Come" (speaking with cheerful encouragement), "your memory is recovering. I was certain that it would not be possible wholly to forget the names and existence of a husband and child, all in the course of one little year."

"I repeat that I never heard of them till this instant," replied Helen, with wonderful composure, but blazing eyes.

"Did you never hear of Mrs. Glass, who lives in Stubb's-court?"

"Yes, I have heard of her," she answered, with embarrassment.

"And you remitted her money within the last three months for the support of an infant in her charge! You wrote to her, hoping that the child was well, enclosing fifteen pounds!"

A low acent was barely audible from Helen's livid lips.

Surely the waters of destruction were closing over her fast!

Surely her mad act had brought an inconceivably bitter harvest.

"You came home in the Carnatic as Miss Brown—did you not?" proceeded Rupert, judicially.

A bow was her only reply. Her trembling lips refused their office.

"Came direct here, and took up the post of governess, which had been procured by the good offices of a friend in Madras. We can trace your movements down to the present without a single missing link."

It was too true. The weight of circumstantial evidence against her was overpowering, and seemed indisputable to Helen, as she stood before her lover, with tightly-closed lips, and averted pale face, and hands locked together in a vice-like grasp.

"It is unnecessary to state that all is at an end between us. Mrs. Bland, whatever you may do—and the laws of our country, and morality alike, seem to sit lightly on your mind—I have no desire to connive at a bigamy, or to marry the wife of another man!"

Helen tried to speak, but her dry lips refused all utterance.

"No one would think, to *look* at you, that you could be capable of such desperate deceit, such downright deliberate wickedness, such heartlessness, such studied hypocrisy! You have given me some lessons for life. Distrust appearance, put no faith in women—they are *all* false!" said Sir Rupert, in a tone of absolute conviction, more cutting than his words.

"This is your trust in me!" said Helen, with a gasp, finding her voice at last. "I asked you to believe in me, and you said *nothing* would change you!"

"Under ordinary circumstances nothing would have changed me," returned her companion, with slow, impressive utterance; "but there is a limit to one's faith—there is a boundary where belief in the possible ends, and blind, imbecile incredulity commences! I am not going to pass that line, not even for you, Mrs. Bland! You must yourself admit that it is slightly staggering to a man's confidence to discover that the girl he holds as but little lower than the *angels* is actually a wife in hiding, and a mother; that she, the object of his first and only love, is simply a pretty little whitened sepulchre—full of terrible secrets!"

"Oh!" cried Helen, wringing her hands in despair—"what am I to do! How can I clear myself?"

"Ay! How, indeed!" returned Sir Rupert, ironically.

"Listen to me!" she exclaimed, with sudden animation. "I swear to you, in the most solemn manner, that I am not what I seem."

"That I can easily believe," he responded, with exasperating frankness.

"I am neither wife nor mother. I never saw either Colonel Bland or the boy—never!"

"Yet you sold your very wearing apparel to provide for the child's support. How was that?" asked Rupert, with a smile of vast incredulity. "Are you prepared to deny that also?" with raised brows.

"No; I admit that," answered Helen, with visible reluctance.

"Well, then, in admitting that you admit all. It passes the bounds of possibility that any one woman would sell her own clothes to support the offspring of another person of whom, by her own account, she knows naught and has never seen. No; that is asking a little *too* much from one's power of imagination! And now, I think we understand each other," he concluded, looking round for his hat, and evidently preparing to depart.

"I understand you—but you do not and will not understand me!" cried Helen, indignantly. "Shall I tell you who I really am? Will you hear me?" she pleaded, with outstretched hands. "I know that appearances are terribly against me—that all around looks black—but I looked to you to stand by me. Shall I tell you who I really am?" she asked, impetuously.

"Thank you, *ne*," he returned, with a derisive smile; "do not tax your powers of invention any farther. I know you now, Mrs. Bland, to my sorrow, and I think there is nothing more to be said."

"There is a great deal more to be said!" cried Helen, passionately; "but not here. Your love is worth little, your faith is a fiction. You can go, Sir Rupert Lynn," waving her hand impulsively towards him. "We shall never meet again; but some day you will be very sorry that you judged so harshly and so hastily of—"

"Mrs. Bland," he suggested, as he opened the door, and bowed a deferential farewell.

CHAPTER XIX.

KATIE readily gathered from Helen's drawn, white face that something had happened—that all was not going well between her and her cousin.

Even the careless Loo-Loo asked if she had a headache, and would she let her off some of her lessons the next day!

When this engaging young person had departed

bedwards, Katie was informed that all was over between Helen and Rupert. No particulars could she glean—the bare, plain fact was all the sum of her intelligence.

"He could not trust me—that was all," returned Helen, wearily, in answer to her friend's eager queries. "It is hard to trust sometimes when appearances are fearfully against one!" she added, hopelessly.

"Then Rupert has found out something that you did not want him to discover—*yet*," said Katie, with her usual alertness of intellect.

"He has," responded Helen, resting her head on her arms, her arms on the table.

"Something *very* bad!" asked Katie, in a voice of hushed interrogation.

"Something that looks *very* bad, and I suppose that is all the same. Oh, Kitty, Kitty! whatever you do, never be led into deception—never endeavour to personate another character even—in *fun*!"

"The last thing I should think of doing, or could do," returned Katie, with painful thoughts of her deformity. "But I'll tell you what I think, shall I?"

"Yes," said Helen, raising her eyes, heavy with unshed tears, to Katie's dainty profile.

"Whatever mischief or harm has been set going, believe me that Blanche is at the bottom of it! It seems a shame to say it of my own sister, but it is my firm conviction and belief."

We will not linger over Helen's tears—Helen's agony of regret for her lost dream of happiness—her lost lover. Instead of future golden visions of beatitude, a hideous, horrible nightmare seemed now to surround and envelop her—something dreadful was going to happen.

She had a presentiment of coming evil; but what form would it take?

All she valued most was already gone—now that Rupert despised and disowned her.

Many a night she spent in long and bitter vigil, and many a night she cried herself to sleep.

Oh! when would she be free from the shadow of her fatal fellow-passenger? When would security and safety and happiness come to her from Tasmania?

One lovely autumn day Katie and Loo-Loo announced that they would drive over to Cargow—the very name of which affected Helen like a brand of hot iron on her mind—and she, pleading a bad headache, declared she would stay at home and lie down till tea-time. Not that there was any fear of seeing Cargow's master—he had gone abroad a few days after his interview with Helen, and no one had heard from him or knew his whereabouts.

Instead of lying down, Helen, having carefully locked her door, drew out and opened, for the first time, her dead fellow passenger's two modest boxes.

The first contained merely linen and underclothing—the other several familiar shabby dresses, some music, an album of faded photographs, a few articles of Indian jewellery, a few books, and a large open volume of Letta's Diary.

She hastily packed away all the contents of both trunks, with the exception of the album and the diary.

Yes, she was going to read it; for was it not her diary? And must she not be ready to stand prepared for the consequences of various actions that no doubt were written down within its leaves?

So she bathed her hot forehead with eau-de-cologne, drew up her chair by the window, and opened first the album.

It contained a very large assortment of mediocre-looking people. In the first page was Rachel, taken evidently before care had set its seal upon her countenance, and what a pretty, bright girl she looked. Further on was a photo of her, representing the wreck of her charms—a ghastly, hollow-cheeked young woman, with frightened eyes, and having in her arms a puny little creature in long clothes, Teddy, of course. Opposite to this picture was one of a man in white undress uniform—a man with a long black beard, and an expression of fiery defiance—not

by any means a plain man, not by any means a pleasant picture.

"Colonel Bland, in other words!" exclaimed Helen, "and this—is the man that Rupert believes to be my husband. Heaven forbid!" she murmured, as she closed the clasp and restored the album to its proper place.

And now for the diary.

The diary had only been kept by fits and starts. Sometimes there was a lapse of weeks and months, and it evidently extended over a period of two or three years. The first entry was:

"Nagapet, Feb. '78.—Oh! my dear diary! I have not written one word in you yet this year—what a shame! I have been engaging myself so much, and my time has been so happily filled, that I have not had a moment to spare for you. I fancy that very happy people never keep diaries. They ought to—to look back on all their good and pleasant days, and spend them over and over and over again. When—but I am writing rubbish—let me see. The gunner's ball was on the 1st, and I danced nearly all night with Teddy—yes! despite of Mrs. Simmons's (my *chaperone's*) scowl. The 4th we had that long ride, dinner and moonlight dance in the old palace—Teddy again! The 9th, Teddy dined here. The 15th, a white day. Teddy asked me to be his wife. Yes, this is the 23rd. I have been engaged to Teddy ten whole days. I am so happy I can scarcely believe that it is not all a dream!"

"April the 5th.—Oh! April the 5th, I shall always hate you. Teddy has just told me that he is ordered to take a draft of men to Aden—horrid, odious Aden!—but he will only be away three weeks at most. He will be back for my birthday, the 8th of May, but I won't marry him till June—no, no! whatever he may say. May is an unlucky month for weddings."

"April the 27th.—We hear that there is cholera at Aden. Oh, how am I to live in this awful anxiety? Eleven more long, endless days. How am I to live through them?"

"May the 8th.—A telegram has just come—I don't believe it, no, nor ever shall. I can write down its news quite calmly, for it is not true—it says that *Teddy is dead!*"

"November 11.—A year and a-half has gone and I have got over my great sorrow. I am alive and well. I did not go mad. I laugh and talk and eat and drink and dance just as I did when he was alive, and yet I know that I shall never be the same. I see the reflection of my faded looks in people's faces of surprise or pity or indifference, and yet I was very pretty once, but the best part of me—my heart—is buried in a corner of that remote sandy cemetery, in Teddy's sun-scorched grave. Ah, what do my looks matter? Who cares about them now?"

"December 18th.—So Colonel Bland, who has come down from the Opal Hills for our little race meeting, wants to marry me. Why? I am sure I don't want to marry him. He is rich, they say; good-looking in a certain style, too, but there is an odd, wild, erratic light in his eyes that puzzles me. Then, how restless he is, and at the race ball how odd he looked. Was it, as he said, the sun? or, query, was it not the champagne? But I am far too hard to please, Robert says—dear Bob! I never intend to leave you. I mean to be an old maid!"

"I have not opened this since last December, since Robert got a fall from his horse and was killed on the spot, and I was left almost penniless; but, thanks to Laura Phillips—not alone—thanks to Laura also, I am married. I am no longer Rachel Fraser, I am Rachel Bland; and we start for our new home next week. Have I been wise? Time will show!"

"August the 10th.—How lonely it is here! They have all gone away; gone down again to the Plains now that the weather is cooler, and George and the doctor and the barrack-surgeon and a handful of soldiers are all that are left on this desolate hill. How one misses the merry voices of one's kind—the tannia-parties, the little daily gossips, and small and feeble jokes. How shall I drag on to next February? Ugh! how hateful it is sitting in this long, bare verandah and watching the mist rising among the hills; watching the far-away happy plains

fading in the twilight, and listening to the jackals scouring round the passes, and the hyena's hideous howl; listening, too, for his footstep as he comes in from a long day's shooting. I must tell someone or I shall die! I will—I shall write it down. Far, far beyond loneliness, nightfall, and hyenas do I fear him! There! you know my secret now!"

"November 20th.—The baby has been called *Teddy*. Yet I actually carried my point in that! He does not guess the reason, and merely objected for the pleasure of thwarting me. Ah! baby, if I could love you better than I do it would be because of the name you bear. I may call *Teddy*, *Teddy*! and now some day someone will answer and break the terrible silence of the last three years!"

"Feb. 25.—I shall go mad! I cannot stand this dreadful uncertainty—this horror of lying down at night and never knowing if I shall see another sun. Once I opened my eyes, its breath was on my cheek, hot and hurried, like the breath of some wild animal; he was glaring into my face with eyes like flame, a long knife in his hand. Resolutely I gave him back stare for stare, and with a gaze of unfaltering firmness I saved my life! I broke the spell, for, with a snarl of disappointment, he buried the knife not in me—but in the bed-clothes!"

 * * * * *

"Feb. —How he drinks! A whole bottle of brandy a day *always*, sometimes more, and yet he is never actually drunk! How his hand trembles though! how wild he looks at times! Without doubt he is now and then quite insane. He sees things. Is not this what they call *delirium tremens*? He is his own commanding officer. No one can interfere with him—no one can save me! If in one of his fits of madness he murders me, cuts my throat from ear to ear, as he has so often threatened, I may call, and shriek, and scream in vain! Ours is a lonely bungalow; our servants sleep in distant quarters. I and the doctor have quarrelled; I may not even speak to him now!"

 * * * * *

"With a drawn sword last night he chased me from room to room! I fled with baby like a mad thing from the dining-room to the verandah, the verandah to the bedroom, the bedroom to the dining-room, he pursuing us, with his head low, his eyes glaring, with swift silent strides, sword in hand, and uttering the most awful curses, and threats enough to turn one's blood to ice!

"Thanks to Heaven's mercy, he tripped in the matting, and I had time to fly into my dressing-room and barricade the door—bolted first, and then I pushed all the furniture against it—and there baby and I lay on the floor all night, listening to his oaths and imprecations, and violent assaults on the creaking, shivering partition!

"In the morning he was as usual, and made some kind of muttered apology for 'keeping me awake!' My mind is made up on one subject most thoroughly. I shall send *Teddy* home with Mrs. Glass. I suppose it is my duty to remain here as long as my reason holds out; and, moreover, I have no money, nothing but Aunt Fanny's little legacy of fifty pounds a year, and he drew it all last time, and spent every penny. Only for *Teddy*—little *Teddy*!—how thankful I would be to lie down and die! But to die quietly and peacefully—to pass away in my sleep—not to be murdered, not to be hacked to pieces after a long and fruitless resistance."

"March 20th.—*Teddy* went down the Ghant to-day with Mrs. Glass—thank Heaven for all its mercies!"

This was the last entry in the diary.

Helen replaced the book, locked the box, and sat down once more in the window, with her hands clasped in her lap, and gave herself up to some moments of very serious reflection.

She found herself responsible for the maintenance of a child she had never seen.

Yes, and in spite of the terrible mischief that he had unconsciously worked her "*Teddy*" should never want a friend as long as she was alive; more over, she would do all in her power to hide him and

keep him far from the clutches of his fiendish father—his fiendish father, who, by all accounts, was actively engaged in searching for her, and hunting her down. She could not refrain from a shudder at the mere thought.

In taking Rachel Brown's lot upon her even in this temporary manner, she had saddled herself with the horrible possibility of being captured, denounced, or may be murdered by a dangerous, homicidally-disposed lunatic!

It was not only that all her sweet visions of happiness had been shattered, and that she now appeared to her lover in the blackest of hues, but she absolutely went in daily peril—not merely of an *éclaircissement*, and of being accused as an imposter, but in danger of her life. Now she could never rid herself of perpetually suspicious conjectures that she was being watched and followed.

These were not very exhilarating thoughts for a girl, who, but for her own Quixotic folly, would have undoubtedly been revelling in the society of multitudes of friends, living in the lap of luxury, and spending the comfortable income of five thousand a year!

CHAPTER XX.

TOWARDS the middle of September Mrs. Despard and her family returned home, and whatever spell absence had worked in her and Miss Blanche, with regard to their *bête noir*, the governess, there could be no possible doubt, but that as far as Mr. Augustus was concerned, he nobly embodied the good motto, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," as far as Helen was concerned.

Whether it was that her pale cheeks and increased slenderness of figure appealed more to his taste than sweet, laine roses, and a gracious presence I know not for certain, but I should say probably; as he himself was inclined to be rubicund of visage and roundabout girth, and people generally admire their opposites.

He had proceeded to lay siege to Helen in an alarming manner, persecuted her with bouquets, books, and, worse still, notes—waylaid her on every possible occasion with enormous looks and sighs, and was absolutely stone deaf to every snub.

His admiration and his attention were patent to all, even to his mother and sister, who lived so much apart from "the school-room."

Helen was nearly driven to the verge of desperation.

She never opened a book, took up her work, or moved an ornament without having just grounds for expecting to discover some hateful, lurking note.

"I cannot stand this!" she exclaimed one day, tossing two simultaneously into the fire. "It amounts to downright persecution! Only for circumstances over which I have no control, Katie, I would really go."

But, despite of circumstances, she was going—going a good deal sooner than she anticipated, and going in a very humiliating manner.

As I have before mentioned, Dolly's infatuation was not lost on his mother, and she was no stranger to his mad, preposterous, ludicrous love-making as she called it. But provided he was only amusing himself she was perfectly indifferent to the matter.

However, one day, she received a rude awakening. It was her habit to pay visits of secret inspection to Katie's room and the schoolroom when all the young people were out; and one sunny afternoon, as she was making her rounds, it suddenly occurred to her to open Miss Brown's workbasket, and there, lying on the top of all her crewel wools, like a little viper in the grass, was a pink cocked-hat note addressed to the governess in Dolly's well-known erratic writing, and unopened.

Without a moment's hesitation, or the smallest scruple, his anxious mother transferred the little *billet doux* to the pocket of her apron, and burrowing from the apartment to the privacy of her own room, tore open the treasure-trove with hasty, nervous fingers.

It will be unnecessary to transcribe the epistle

here in full, but after three lines of endearing epithets, it broke into a very plain, ardently-worded offer of marriage. "Yes, an offer of marriage," Mrs. Despard whispered to herself in an awed undertone, as she dropped the paper as if it had scorched her fingers. "The old birds, would be soon brought round," said the enraptured lover. "Would they?" repeated one of them, with a stiffening of her person that boded ill for the fulfilment of his happy prophecy.

"This is going really too far. I must speak to Blanche," said Mrs. Despard, rising precipitately, and starting off in pursuit of that prime minister of hers, her eldest daughter.

"It seems that it is not enough that she has bamboozled your father and entangled Rupert, but she must have Dolly at her feet into the bargain," cried Mrs. Despard, with biting emphasis, as she thrust her son's little missive into his sister's pale ring-bedeviled hand. "What do you think of that, Blanche?" she asked, after a silence of more than five minutes.

"I think that Dolly is a stupid little fool," responded Miss Despard amiably; and making up her mind, with sudden resolution, she added, "But you need not be in the least nervous, mother. She cannot marry Dolly now," with a glow of comfortable conviction—"or Rupert either," with a reassuring smile.

"And why not? What is to hinder her," demanded her mother, forcibly.

"A little trifling obstacle," replied Blanche, with gentle irony. "A husband."

"What!" almost screamed Mrs. Despard, incredulously.

"I have long known that she is a married woman," returned her daughter, with a modest pride in her own discovery. "She is no more a Miss Brown than I am! She is a Mrs. Bland, the wife of a drunken Indian colonel. She is separated from him, and she has a child in London in the care of a soldier's wife. That was what she wanted an advance of salary for, to remit money for its keep. She sold me her seal-skin coat—she was so terribly hard up."

"A married woman, with a child! Why, she doesn't look more than one-and-twenty. Well, you are a clever girl, Blanche," gasped Mrs. Despard, gazing at her offspring with unqualified admiration. "I always knew there was a screw loose; but a married woman!—a rank impostor. Why, what can Laura Phillips have been thinking of? How can she recommend such a person! Well, anyway, your father won't be able to say anything now; and go she shall—say, this very night. It is my duty to dismiss her at once."

And this was a duty of a kind that Mrs. Despard rarely shrank from—getting rid of an obnoxious inmate.

Straightening her cap, and rearranging her bracelets, she sailed majestically out of the room, and instantly made her way into her husband's study, where she laid the matter before him with much eloquence of speech and gesture.

Blanche was called in as a witness, and without any reserve whatever gave her parents a *résumé* of her two visits to Mrs. Glass.

Mr. Despard, when the recital was concluded, looked absolutely stupefied, his wife merely calmly triumphant.

Be assured that she did not fail to seize the golden opportunity, and read her husband a short lecture on the folly of elderly men who allowed their reason and their ideas of right and wrong to be perverted by the charms of a mischievous, designing adventuress with plausible manners and a passable face.

Misfortunes never come alone, but in battalions.

That very morning Helen had received a letter from Tasmania telling her that her great reliance, Mr. Towers, had had a bad fall from his horse, had broken his leg in two places, that his recovery was likely to be tedious, and that now he could not possibly go to Europe before the spring.

"But," added his wife cheerfully, "as you are so comfortably placed with your own family and in the country, which we know you like much better than the town, we feel quite sure you will not be very much disappointed after all."

Not disappointed after all! It was a cruel blow.

It was too hard, after all her feverish anticipations, her counting of the very days.

Helen simply laid her head down on her arms, and wept with heart-broken bitterness. How was she to endure her present life for five weary months longer?

How was she to bear with Mrs. Despard, to tolerate Dolly, to stifle the aching pain that was ever and always at her heart—the recollection of her lost lover, the pangs of wounded pride and blighted hopes!

That very evening, after tea, she was sent for to the drawing-room—she alone.

"Mr. and Mrs. Despard wished to see her."

There was something in the solemn way in which the message was delivered that made Helen's heart beat with a vague feeling of alarm as she rose and obeyed the summons, following the footman almost mechanically downstairs.

She found the family (grown up) assembled in full conclave, evidently prepared to deliver judgment or rebuke on some weighty matter.

Mr. Despard was standing on the rug with his thumbs in the armholes of his coat, gloomily surveying the carpet.

Dolly was sitting astride a chair, with red and solemn countenance. Mrs. Despard and her daughter were seated bolt upright, looking almost magisterial in the severity and sorrow depicted on their faces.

"Miss Brown, ma'am," said the red-breast, abruptly announcing her, and thus launching the miserable victim into the lion's den.

CHAPTER XXL

"We have sent for you, Mrs. Bland"—Helen started visibly—"We have sent for you," pursued Mrs. Despard, in a high acrid voice, "to inform you that we now know *all* about you; as to who you really are and how you have deceived us, and I beg to state that both Mr. Despard and myself"—waving one hand majestically towards her better half—"are simply horrified at the imposition you have practised upon us, and have no further occasion for your services," watching with cold eyes the effect of this heavy blow.

Helen could not speak.

"To think," proceeded Mrs. Despard, invoking the ceiling with deep solemnity, "that my old friend, Laura Phillips, would have dared to assist you to this situation. A woman separated from her husband, with a child, in the purloin of London—a woman with a false name, and probably"—regarding Helen with a knife-edged look from her narrow slits of eyes—"a woman with little or no character! But Laura and I have not met for years"—turning to her husband with an explanatory gesture—"and Laura was always an oddity, and lax in some matters. Have you anything to say for yourself, Mrs. Bland?" she added, after an appreciative pause.

"I am not Mrs. Bland!" returned Helen, speaking with an effort.

All this time she had been standing alone in the middle of the room, as befitting a convicted culprit upon whom a sentence was about to be delivered.

"Not Mrs. Bland!" echoed Blanche, with a laugh. "I suppose the next thing that we shall hear is that the child at Mrs. Glass's is not yours."

"You are quite right. It is no more mine than your own," replied Helen, emphatically.

"And you never sold your sealskin coat to pay for its keep? and you never wrote to Mrs. Glass asking how it was getting on, and promising more money? Oh, no, of course not. It is all in our imagination!" said Blanche, with scathing sarcasm.

"Did you come home in the *Carnatic* even?" inquired Mrs. Despard, following up her daughter's lead.

"Yes, I came home in the *Carnatic*," replied Helen, in a choked voice.

"And you have been figuring here ever since as an unmarried girl," broke in Dolly, with

wrathful impetuosity. "By Jove, it beats everything I ever heard of. Fancy taking me in, not to speak of Rupert. Think of our both being dead nuts on a married woman!"

"Be silent, Augustus," said his mother, impetuously. "Console yourself with the fact that you are by no means the *only* person Mrs. Bland has taken in. You would make an admirable actress, madam. I should strongly recommend you to try the stage. I need scarcely remark that you need not refer to me for another situation."

"Then what am I to do?" asked Helen, boldly. "No one will take me without a reference."

"I should think your wife would easily provide you with one, and you must tax them tomorrow morning," returned Mrs. Despard, calmly.

"Am I to understand that I am to go to-morrow, and without—"

"Without a character. Certainly," responded Mrs. Despard, finishing up the sentence. "In fact, only for my husband's kindness you would have gone *to-night*!"

"And what in Heaven's name am I to do, madam, without a home—without friends, without a reference? Surely, you will not be so cruel! Allow me to remain under your roof a little longer, till—ah! I hear from abroad!" pleaded Helen.

"Certainly not!" replied her hostess, in her most frosty tone.

"You have plenty of resources, Mrs. Bland," said Blanche. "So many *characters* at command—you have been so successful in this, why not try another?" with a smile of amiable interrogation.

Driven to bay, Helen replied, impetuously,—"I will—I will try, as you kindly advise, another personation."

Yes! I making up her mind with lightning rapidity, she would declare herself. In such desperate straits there was no choice. To be turned out in the world, without money, friends, or reference, would simply mean—starvation.

"Shall I tell you who I *really* am?" she asked, looking eagerly from one to the other with crimson cheeks, and speaking with low, impressive utterance. A simultaneous laugh from Blanche and Dolly was, for some seconds, her only reply.

Presently Mrs. Despard, with a slow, artful smile, remarked,—

"Thanks, no. I do not think that our credulity would bear a *further* strain!"

"Aunt Isabella, I am your niece—Helen Brown, from Tasmania!"

"Aunt Isabella," echoed Mrs. Despard, half rising in her chair, and literally purple with passion.

"How dare you, madam—how dare you call me aunt! You are no more my niece than—that sofa. My niece is dead. A bold stroke, indeed! A fine flight of imagination to think you can graft yourself on me, Mrs. Bland!"

"But I solemnly declare that every word I say is gospel truth—it is indeed!" replied Helen, with quivering lips. "At least let me speak; give me a hearing," she urged, turning with one outstretched, imploring hand to where her uncle, who had observed a strict neutrality, stood leaning against the chimney-piece, in solemn silence.

As long as he lives Mr. Despard will never forget that scene.

When he closes his eyes now it comes quite distinctly before his mental vision—a tall, slight, fair girl, in a clinging black dress, with imploring eyes and beseeching outstretched hands, appealing to him for justice and mercy.

"At any rate, let her speak. She has a right to be heard, Isabella. What is your story, Miss—Mrs. Bland?" he said, with assumed severity.

"Story indeed," sneered Blanche, quite audibly.

"I am not Mrs. Bland. I never even heard of the name till the other day—"

Here she was interrupted by a loud "Haw, haw," from Dolly.

"My name is really Helen Brown. My father was Mrs. Despard's brother."

"That is a falsehood!" interposed her aunt, sharply; "an impudent, audacious falsehood."

"And he died at Rosemount, our place, near Hobart Town—nearly sixteen months ago. I am his only child, and I was on my way to England to make my home with his relatives, who appeared ready to welcome me with open arms."

Here she sent a glance of inexpressible significance at her aunt and uncle.

"I had—nay, I have—upwards of five thousand pounds a-year, and I feared that perhaps my new connections might value me for my money."

"We changed ship at Galle, and came on in the *Carnatic*, the Madras steamer. On board of her I found, to my amazement, another Miss Brown, a little older than myself—an orphan."

"We soon became friends; we shared the same cabin, and I discovered, to my surprise, that we were actually bound for the very same home."

Here Helen paused.

She had been speaking with a great effort; her heart was palpitating so quickly, her lips were trembling so foolishly, but in a moment or two she recovered her self-command, and proceeded, in a calm, even voice.

"It struck me that it would be an excellent plan to change places for a time—I to personate the poor governess; she to take the part of the rich Tasmanian heiress. I thought I would like to try and make my relations love me for myself alone, and then when I had insured their affection I meant to reveal my little fraud."

"As you are doing now," put in Blanche, with an ironical smile.

"For some time Miss Brown would not listen to my plan, but at last I over-persuaded her, and she entered into the plot; but only for boardship she affirmed. I have too good cause now to know her reasons for declining my foolish, my imbecile project."

"The passengers and captain had never seen much difference between us, and easily accepted Rachel as the heiress."

"But in a fearful storm one night she died of disease of the heart, and when I had recovered the shock I found that all my belongings were sealed up and put away as her property, that my aunt had been written to, and acquainted with my death, and that I was now most emphatically the poor Miss Brown."

"Poor Miss Brown!" echoed Blanche, sarcastically.

Helen took no notice of this little interruption; but calmly continued her story, addressing herself now entirely to her uncle.

"I had not the moral courage to tell the other passengers that it had been partly a joke, and was now all a miserable mistake. I waited till I went to London, when I saw my father's solicitors—Sharp and Short."

"Ah," interposed Mr. Despard, significantly.

"They, or rather he, Mr. Sharp, would not believe my tale; he would not listen to me."

"Wise man!" interpolated Blanche.

"I had no proofs, for I had no luggage—except the other Miss Brown's, which, of course, did not belong to me. I had but little money, no friends, so my only resource was to come and take the situation here in *court*. I came, as you all know; I wrote to my friends in Tasmania and told them of my folly, and of my dilemma, and they were very much vexed; and said, as a punishment, and believing that I was happily and comfortably situated among my own relations and under my own aunt's roof, that they would not help me, nor come to my assistance for a year."

"And the child!" inquired Mrs. Despard, pointedly.

"I never knew that the other Miss Brown was travelling under an assumed name—that she was really a Mrs. Bland, and had a child in London till the other day, when I received that enclosed note from Mrs. Phillips, a stranger. As I have taken the place, in a certain way, of the child's mother, of course I must provide for it to the utmost of my power. I acknowledge that responsibility, but Colonel Bland I do not know; and that the child is mine, or that I have ever even seen

it, I most solemnly deny. I have been, to some extent, an impostor, I acknowledge. I acted with impudent folly—a folly for which I have been most bitterly punished. And I am your niece. Aunt Isabella! won't you believe me?" stretching out her hands.

Mrs. Despard glared at her in stony silence. No, she would never acknowledge this fair-haired romance as kith and kin—never supposing for one second that what she had been telling them was *true*. The mere idea threw Mrs. Despard into a cold perspiration.

"Very nicely told, indeed! You have a most fertile imagination; but you are not my niece, all the same!" she remarked, at length, with terrible emphasis.

"It quite reminded me of the Sultana Sheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*," remarked Miss Blanche, with languid impertinence. "But I really think that to try to assume the character of our rich Tasmanian cousin, who is dead and buried, is *un peu trop fort*. Think of somebody else, Mrs. Bland!"

"Blanche!" exclaimed Helen, sharply, "some day you will be sorry that you have been so hard on me! You believe me, don't you, Mr. Despard?" she urged, turning to him imploringly. "You have always been my kind friend."

Poor Mr. Despard, with his wife's eyes transfixing him like two steel poniards, how dare he say *yes*!

"No, my dear young lady, I *cannot* say that I am convinced. I am afraid you are labouring under some strange hallucination about your own identity. I could not believe that any girl, who was not practically an *idiot*, would have done what you profess to have done. That any girl would give up her heiress-ship, her thousands a year, her happy prospects, and change, of her own *free will*, with an utter stranger—an acquaintance of a few days—and accept the rôle of a poor, friendless governess. No, no! it is too much to ask of me!" putting up both his hands with a gesture of depreciation. "Why did you not make your story known to the captain, and recover your own belongings? or why did you not discover yourself to us a year ago?" he demanded, with practical emphasis.

"Ah, why, indeed! Why do people do many foolish things!" said Helen, with tears in her eyes. "Then you do not believe me?" she added, looking sorrowfully round with a last appeal. "Oh, won't you believe me?" she added with a sob, wrung from the depths of her misery.

"No, Mrs. Bland," said her hostess, rising. "We do not believe you. You are very clever; but you are not my niece! And now, as I have said my say, and you have said yours, we need not detain you. The carriage will take you to the train—the 11.25 from Wilmington—tomorrow morning, and I do not think it will be necessary for us to meet again—"

"And I, your brother's child, as I most solemnly declare to you that I am—"

"Go," cried Mrs. Despard, angrily, rudely seizing her by the arm, and leading her towards the door. "Do not go over all that nonsense again. Go, you audacious impostor."

And in another moment Helen found herself thrust out into the hall, and the drawing-room door slammed in her face.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning Helen, having collected and packed her small belongings, bade a sorrowful adieu to her two friends, Loo-Loo and Katie.

Sitting on the side of her bed, with Katie's hand in hers, and Loo-Loo's arm tightly encircling her neck—Loo-Loo in floods of tears—she repeated her story of the previous evening, and this time to warmly interested and faithfully believing ears.

"I am not surprised—not one bit, now I know how it was that I took to you from the first. You were my own cousin. There was some secret sympathy between us that I never could understand. Now it is fully accounted for. Our tastes, our dispositions are not unnaturally

similar, since we are the children, on one side, of the same grand-parents."

"But you are not going? You shan't go, dear Helen," sobbed Loo-Loo.

"I am; and I must go now. I hear the carriage coming round on the sweep—and there's the bell. I will write to you both, of course."

"Often, very often," interposed Katie, in a broken voice.

"Yes, very often—and some day or other, under happier circumstances. No doubt, my dear cousins, we shall all meet again," and bestowing several hearty kisses on her two friends, who seemed almost stunned by the suddenness of her departure, she tore herself from their detaining arms, and hurried from the room, anxious to retain her own self-command—to choke back her rising emotion, and to present a calm, immovable mien to the rest of the family downstairs; but none of the other inmates came to wish her adieu, save John Thomas, the footman, who handed her an envelope, addressed to "Mrs. Bland" from his mistress, with a significant smile on his own behalf.

It contained her salary, she discovered, as she was rapidly driven down the avenue. Six pounds seven shillings and sixpence—how far would that go in the great London world? How was she to pay for Teddy?

Before she had gone any distance the carriage came to a halt in the road, and Mr. Despard's solemn, good-natured face appeared at the window.

He had a note in his hand, too, and seemed to have something on his mind.

"I thought I would just say good-bye to you, miss, and tell you how sorry I am that such unfortunate matters have occurred. I wanted to thank you for all your kindness to my little Katie, too, and to ask you to accept this," tendering the envelope with a rather frightened expression on his homely red countenance.

"Do you give it to your niece, or to Mrs. Bland?" inquired Helen, with great composure.

"Ah! why—ahem—well, in fact, to Mrs. Bland," he answered, with a stammer.

"Then as Mrs. Bland is not here, it is not in my power to accept your kind offer, Mr. Despard," returned Helen, very stiffly. "Mrs. Bland—poor woman—is dead, as I told you last night. I suppose you are still sceptical about me?" she asked, in a low tone. "You cannot believe that I am really Helen Brown!"

"I cannot!" he answered, in the same voice.

"Then I cannot accept your offer"—leaning back. "There is no more to be said, except good-bye," she added, with a slightly imperious gesture. "Please tell the coachman to drive on," and she proceeded; and with a haughty little bow she was carried rapidly away, leaving Mr. Despard standing in the muddy road, with his offering in his hand, feeling very much like a fool for once in his life.

One would have thought that he was an impudent petitioner, and that she was the great lady, to have judged of the scene by a hasty, passing glance.

Whereas he was the owner of the land on both sides of the road—of that dashing brougham, and well-bred bays—and she was a nobody, going forth alone to fight the bitter battle of life, with half-a-dozen sovereigns in her pocket.

Where was she to go? She must decide without loss of time. She thought of Mrs. Glass, and caught at her name as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

She might be able to help her to some humble decent lodgings in her neighbourhood, and she would be near Teddy.

Then she would look out for some kind of employment, for some fancy-work repository, and try to earn her bread until the Towers came home.

She felt Mr. Towers' letter in her pocket, brought it out, and perused it once more. Little did the writer imagine that, when Helen would be reading it, she had just been cast out into the world—as a strange dog is kicked into the street; that far from being among her own kind

people she was without a friend, and without a roof to shelter her.

When Helen arrived in London she drove direct to Mrs. Glass—paid and discharged the cab—had her boxes carried into the hall, to that good woman's unqualified amazement.

Mrs. Glass's own shock-haired progeny were still at school; Mr. Glass at work—he was a porter—and Helen had no audience for her marvellous tale but Mrs. Glass herself, and Teddy.

There was no doubt whatever that she was not Mrs. Bland—that fact was quite plain to her listener's intelligence—and she listened to Helen's story with her hands on her knees, her eyes widely staring and many and fervent ejaculations of surprise, dismay, and pity.

Yes, pity! She listened with the conviction that every word that came to her ears was gospel truth.

She arose and welcomed her strange guest with hearty hospitality, insisted on removing her hat, her fur tipper, and administering her favourite remedy for every ill and for every care—a strong, long-brewed cup of tea.

After the tea had been despatched Helen felt considerably better, and Mrs. Glass, leaving Teddy in her charge, hastened away to don a very remarkable checked ulster, a purple bonnet with a black feather, and bestowing Teddy on her landlady *pro tem.* took Helen to look at some quiet, clean lodgings within ten minutes' walk of her own apartments.

They were very small—two tiny rooms—looking out on a sooty black wall, but they were clean and cheap, eight shillings a week, coals included—in moderation," the landlady amended.

So the bargain was struck, and Helen and her boxes were safely housed before nightfall. The indefatigable Mrs. Glass having again been her mentor, she accompanied her to a kind of general grocery shop, and laid in a supply of bread, salt-butter, tea, sugar, and a couple of red-herrings; and having seen her back to the door of 2, Alexandra-terrace, took leave of her for the night.

In a few days Helen had quite settled down in her new sphere—had unpacked her boxes under Mrs. Glass's own eyes, that lady recognising many a familiar article belonging to Teddy's mother.

"That's the serge she used to wear at Oupal in the rains. I mind it well—The Dirz made it."

"And now I'll cut it up for Teddy, and all her other things, too," said Helen, cheerfully—"a very good idea."

"Deed it is, it's badly he is off for shirts and night-dresses, and it would be well," returned Mrs. Glass with cordial approval.

So for some time Helen occupied her handy fingers on Teddy's wardrobe; and Teddy became very fond of his "mamma," as he called her, and spent nearly all his days at No. 2. This proceeding gave Mrs. Glass plenty of leisure, and gave Helen something to occupy her mind, so all parties were pleased. When Teddy's garments were all completed his new friend turned her attention to fancy-work, and bought some hand-made materials and embroidery a very pretty mantel-border and curtains to correspond. She worked hard at it for nearly three weeks, and when completed it looked really lovely.

Mrs. Glass, too, was loud in her raptures, and declared it would be cheap for ten pounds. Helen thought five pounds would be ample, and started off in high spirits to offer her goods in some of the fashionable West-end fancy shops; but—alas! for her hopes!—none refused it altogether, and would not even look at it—"they had more already than they could dispose of"—others turned it over contemptuously, and scoffed at the colours—they were not the "art shades"—and no one offered her as much as the bare materials had cost!

There was nothing for it but to return home with a heavy heart, and try some other plan for making money; but meanwhile her purse was nearly empty.

When her next week's rent was paid all that she would have in the world would be five shillings. Yes, just five shillings standing between her and absolute want.

She had no winter jacket. She felt the cold bitterly; and her long tramp about the streets

for three consecutive days, endeavouring to dispose of her work, had a serious effect even on her hasty constitution. For a whole fortnight she was confined to her bed with bronchitis and a bad cough.

Mrs. Glass tended her with almost motherly kindness; and having confessed her troubles into that worthy woman's sympathetic ear told her "that she was now penniless, and a week in arms with her rent."

Mrs. Glass carried off to the pawn office, in the most matter-of-fact manner, her gold watch and chain, and her French satin costume. On the proceeds of these she bought herself a cloth jacket, a coat for Teddy, and struggled on till Christmas.

At Christmas came a hamper—oh! such a welcome hamper!—from Katie and Loo-Loo, bought out of their own money—money that more than once they had ventured to send, and that more than once had been firmly but gratefully returned.

Ay! returned; when perhaps for a whole week Helen had been keeping soul and body together on no better fare than bread and tea!

The hamper was a boon—a fairy gift. It contained a ham, butter, eggs, tea, towels, and jam.

The latter found especial favour with Teddy and the younger members of the Glass family.

But even a Christmas hamper cannot hold out very long, and early in January Helen and Teddy were, so to speak, living on her cream-coloured dress and hat, the parting with which had cost her a terrible pang, not for their becomingness nor value, but because they were indissolubly connected with the happiest days she had ever spent in her life!

Helen now looked very different to the radiant, brilliant belle of that afternoon dance at Cargew. Her dress was poor, threadbare, and shabby; her cheeks white and hollow, her eyes large and sunken, her whole bearing broken-down and depressed.

In the middle of January she had a little adventure. She once more met Rupert Lynn face to face, and under the following circumstances. Little water-coloured drawings and illuminated Christmas cards had been her next commercial venture—not much more successful than her fancy work transaction.

One dull, dark, damp afternoon she had made a weary and unsuccessful round of many shops, and at last boldly ventured into a large, well-known West-end establishment. Several customers were purchasing at the various counters, and at the one she timidly approached stood two gentlemen, one with his back to her, evidently intent on some pencil cases, the other standing at ease and staring aimlessly about.

Helen tendered her little packet with a few low sentences of explanation, to which the shopman replied, in a lordly tone of voice,—

"We never do anything in this line, miss! We have our own staff. Amateur work such as yours don't sell; not up to the mark!"

The disappointment, and something in the man's tone, brought the smarting tears to Helen's eyes; and she was wrapping up her poor despised workmanship with hasty fingers, and turning wearily away, when something about her caught the idle stranger's eye.

"Not half a bad-looking girl, eh! Lynn!" giving his companion a friendly poke. "Looks as if she had seen better days, too, I eh!"

Sir Rupert turned with indifferent acquiescence, and his eyes fell upon Helen—Helen, with a white, pinched face, and the garb of a gentle mendicant.

With lightning glance he took in her faded dress, her shabby black hat, her darned gloves, her little packet of rejected offerings, and Helen recognised him not less speedily; but without a second glance she hurried from the shop.

In another instant he was by her side.

"I am sorry to see you looking so ill, Mrs.

A look in her eyes froze the words on his lips. "Are you in London—living in London now?"

"Yes," she answered, with a firm voice.

"Did they send you away from Kingscourt?" he asked, eagerly.

A bow was her sole reply.

"In consequence of the same discovery as I

made last August!" he continued, almost inarticulately.

"In consequence of the same discovery," she echoed, in a chilly tone.

"I cannot bear to see you looking so ill and so miserable!" he suddenly burst forth. "Has your husband not come home? Are you supporting yourself?"

"I have no husband!" she answered, haughtily.

"Why must I again repeat that fact? And as to my way of living it cannot possibly concern you!"

"Will you give me your address?" he asked, looking into her face with steady, dark eyes.

"No!" she answered, severely.

"Will you let me have those little cards in your hand? May I purchase them?" he humbly asked.

"No!" very resolutely.

"Not for the sake of—"

"Charity!" she interposed, hotly. "No, not for the sake of charity. I am not fallen quite so low yet, Sir Rupert Lynn, as to accept your alms."

"I was not going to say for the sake of charity. Why do you put such things in my mouth? I was going to say for *Teddy's* sake."

"And that would have been worse still!" she returned, with low, emphatic utterance. "Please say no more—good-bye!" and in another second she turned a neighbouring corner, and vanished from his view.

"Quer! very queer customer!" remarked his friend, who had been watching the conference with the warmest interest; "but looks as if she might have been good-looking, and it certainly would not surprise me to hear she was a lady."

"I can surprise you still more, Stafford," said his friend, very gravely. "That girl you have just seen was the only woman I ever wished to marry. For two months she was engaged to me, and they were the happiest months in my existence."

"And why did it never come off?" said his friend, with wide-eyed amazement. "How is it she is now a genteel pauper, almost begging her bread, instead of being Lady Lynn?"

"Because," returned his companion, impressively, "I discovered in good time, a fact that she had unfortunately forgotten—she had a husband already!"

(To be continued).

A CHANGE OF BRIDE.

—so—

It was Paul Temple's wedding-night, and the girl he was to have married had jilted him—gone off with another man at the last moment.

That was not all.

Herbert Bronson, the banker, was deeply in debt to Temple, and it had been the tacit understanding that this marriage was to cancel all obligations.

Not that there had been the slightest approach to a bargain, even in thought—Paul loved and supposed himself loved again—but naturally he had been easier in money matters with the man whose son-in-law he expected to be than he would have been with a stranger.

Paul staggered under the blow, but the banker seemed crushed.

He sat in his elegant library, his hands hanging limp from the arms of his chair, his fine form shrunk into such a pitiable heap of shame and dismay that few would have known him.

Temple stood by the mantelpiece, his handsome face white, his hands clenched. It was rage that shook his soul.

The manner in which he had been cheated was maddening. To have been deluded until this last supreme moment, and then forsaken for the creature Ruth Bronson had chosen—an animated doll, a strutting barber's pole.

"See here, Bronson!" he said to the overwhelmed banker, bitterly. "Rouse up, man! I want to talk to you! I came here to-night to be married, and I must have my wife!"

Herbert Bronson stared at him helplessly with dropped jaw.

"Good heavens, man, don't look at me that way!" exclaimed Temple, impatiently. "The guests wait. As yet they know nothing. You have other daughters. Put the bridal fineries on one of them, and let us have the wedding in spite of Ruth. Will you do it? I mean it—yes. Decide quickly: there is no time to lose."

The banker straitened himself, and tried to look a little more rational.

"Which? which?" he gasped. At that moment a young girl, perhaps fifteen, ran into the library.

"Papa, are you ill?" she cried, in a scared voice, flinging her arms round his neck. She was Madge.

She was the youngest of Mr. Bronson's daughters, and possessed the least claims to beauty.

She was in white, of course, which made her gipsy skin seem even darker by contrast. But she had splendid big, black eyes, which turned in luminous wonder now on Paul Temple, as he exclaimed, coming forward and taking her hand in his.

"Madge you are sorry for me. You like me a little, I know. Will you put on the bridal veil your sister has discarded, and come with me and be married to-day? I will never let you regret it."

Madge's very lips turned white and stiff.

Her father put his arm around her.

"She is such a child, Temple," he said, faintly.

"All the better," Paul answered, sternly, keeping fast hold of the little, quivering hand. "She is more likely to be honest and true. Neither you nor she will ever regret it if you give her to me, sir. What do you say, Madge?"

"Papa?" questioned the girl, timidly, turning her little, dark, startled face toward him.

"My child?"

"Shall I, papa? Would you like it?"

Mr. Bronson drew a long anxious breath. Such a marriage would keep money matters on the old footing, and to pay Temple now would break him. It did not take him long to decide.

"Yes," he said, "it would gratify me very much, and save us all—your mother and sisters—from great humiliation."

"Then I will," said Madge.

Her father went himself with her to her sisters and mother, and explained briefly.

The bride's dress and veil and all were there, and Madge was tall for her age.

They fitted her better than might have been expected.

There was no time to get excited.

In a little while all was ready, and the bridal party proceeded to the church.

The ceremony proceeded, was over almost, before any one had discovered that the bride was Madge, instead of Ruth Bronson.

It was a nine days' wonder, and then was succeeded by some other eccentric coruscation in the fashionable heavens.

* * * * *

Four years went by.

Madge had spent them at school, Paul Temple on the continent.

Ruth Bronson Hardinge was home again, a lovely and interesting widow, who had long ago wished she had known when she was well off, and married a rich man while she could get him.

She was entirely dependent on her father, and not too welcome in his house. She almost hated Madge, in her envy of the mistress of Paul Temple's splendid home.

Paul had kept his word, and tried his best that no regrets should follow that hasty and seemingly ill-judged marriage.

He was the master of large means, and he had helped Mr. Bronson lavishly, while he had poured out gifts on Madge, and stayed abroad purposely, to leave her unembarrassed.

They had corresponded freely and constantly, and seemed, neither of them, to have repented.

He was coming home now—was expected daily, hourly almost.

"Shall certainly be with you by the tenth," he wrote Madge, "and bring with me a marriage gift for my wife—a golden egg, worthy a princess's acceptance."

Temple's main income was derived from a mining enterprise called the "Grand Golden Egg Mining Company," in which he was a large shareholder. It was a standing joke between him and Madge that when he came home he was to bring her a "golden egg."

Mrs. Hardinge heard, with feelings of envy that cannot be described.

"It's a great pity you are not a handsomer woman, Madge," she would say to her sister, simperingly. "Paul Temple thinks so much of beauty in a woman. I am not sure I ought to risk seeing him after all that has happened. What would you do if he fell in love with me over again?"

Madge scarcely heard. She was a good deal more anxious as to what her husband would think about her than she was concerning his falling in love over again with Ruth.

She was so little self-conscious that she did not know the little, plain, dark-skinned girl had become one of the most beautiful women to be found anywhere.

The time seemed very long to her. The tenth came and went, and still no Paul. She began to be very anxious.

The morning papers of the eleventh brought disastrous news.

The Grand Consolidated Golden Egg Mining Company had gone by the board—burst like a pricked bubble.

It was told at the breakfast-table, and everyone turned white but Ruth, who burst into an exultant laugh.

"That is what keeps him!" she sneered. "It is to be hoped your golden egg is safe, Madge."

"Ruth," said her father, almost fiercely, "another speech like that will cost you the slim welcome you at present have under my roof! Mind it!"

Madge sat like one turned to stone.

Presently she rose, and went out of the room, motioning the others back when they would have followed her.

"I want to be alone," she said, simply.

The next moment a note was brought the barker, signed "Paul Temple," and saying,—

"I am in the library. Come to me, without letting Madge know."

Smothering an exclamation, Bronson left the room.

The two men met, agitatedly.

"How does she take it?" demanded Paul, eagerly. "Shall I go and blow my brains out? or will you get her a divorce? You can, I dare say," he said, in a jesting tone, that jarred fearfully on his father-in-law's already shaken nerves.

There was a small bay-windowed alcove opening from the library, across which a curtain swung at pleasure.

Neither of the men had noticed that at the first tone of Temple's voice this curtain had lifted, and shown Madge just as she had fled there from the dining-room.

As those dreadful words fell from her husband's lips she moved towards him.

He turned suddenly and saw her, and, notwithstanding the wonderful transformation in her, knew her.

The next moment she was in his arms.

Bronson stole quietly out of the room.

"I let them settle it themselves," he muttered.

"Why, how is this?" asked Paul, at last, looking fondly down into the radiant, blushing face upon his bosom. "You don't mean to say you love me, Madge!"

A happy, sweet laugh, and closer-clinging arms answered him.

"But have you heard? Do you know what misfortunes have overtaken me?" he questioned.

"Of course I have heard! Do you suppose I care, so long as I have got you?"

And then to his amazement Madge burst into tears.

"Oh, Paul!" she said; "promise me you will never again say such dreadful things as you said just now to papa."

"I promise," he answered, laughing. "I was only jesting anyway, you goose! My money is not gone. I sold out of the mine over a year ago. Lucky, wasn't I? Oh, Madge!" holding

her off to look at her—oh, my darling! How beautiful you are!"

"Am I indeed? Do I really seem so to you?" cried Madge, joyfully.

"I have not seen so lovely a face in all my travels," he answered, enthusiastically.

"I am so glad!" she said, nestling down into his arms again.

It had been almost on her lips to ask if he was as handsome as he once thought Ruth. But even the memory of that doubt died now.

Not for worlds would she have mentioned her sister.

"But all the same," said Paul, presently, "I have brought you a golden egg. Wait till you see that. Oh, you needn't look!" he added, laughing. "I haven't got it about me. It wasn't exactly a convenient article to put in my pocket."

The egg in question proved to be a jewel-casket of most costly description, enriched with diamond, ruby and pearl treasures, such as would have turned the head of almost any woman, but did not Madge's.

To find herself beautiful in her husband's eyes, and dearly beloved in his heart, dizzied her sweet, true soul more than the glitter of gems from a queen's diadem could have done.

FACETIA.

ATTORNEY (badgering witness): "Now, sir, would you like to swear?" Witness: "Yes, I would."

YOUNG LADY: "Tell me, Mr. McFlimsey, what do you consider the work of your life?" McF.: "Living."

HE: "I hear Mrs. Oldgirl is going to marry Tommy Small." She: "Is that so? I wonder if he knows it?"

Mrs. PAYNE: "Where did you get the design of your servants' livery?" Sash: "Oh, my ancestors used it!" "Indeed! by whom were they employed?"

FOND PARENT: "Bobby, why will you always persist in pushing in the eyes of your little sister's dolls?" Bobby: "Because I can't pick 'em out."

Mrs. KNERVZ rang the bell for the servant. "Norah," she said, "I'll feed the canary myself after this. The doctor says I must take more exercise."

"YOU swear positively you were not to blame for the man's death!" said the coroner. "Certainly, sir; they did not call me soon enough," said the doctor, haughtily.

CHARLEY: "It's easy enough to get married. All a man has to do is to find a bigger fool than himself." Ethel: "But in some cases even that would be rather difficult."

BLOGGS: "I have known a fellow so hard up that he has smoked cabbage leaves." Wroggs: "That's nothing. I know a tradesman in High-street who has smoked bacon."

TEACHER: "Now, boys, who was Columbus?" No answer. Teacher (prompting): "The man that—?" Class (readily): "Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo."

FIRST STUDENT: "How did it happen that you failed again?" Second Student: "Why that wretched examiner asked me the same question that I couldn't answer last year."

MINNIE: "What do understand by the term platonic affection?" Mamie: "Well, it usually means that the young man feels that he cannot afford to marry."

LITIGANT: "You take nine-tenths of the judgment! Outrageous!" Lawyer: "I furnished the skill and eloquence and legal learning for your cause." "But I furnished the cause." "Oh, anybody could do that."

"THEIR my love," said the young husband, as he placed a large bundle on the table, "I've bought you a pair of sleeves." "Oh, you darling!" exclaimed the delighted wife. "I'm so happy! Anything will do for a dress."

GRANNY (reading): "Here's a report of two men who went down one of the city sewers and were killed by sewer gas. What do they want gas in a sewer for, I wonder?" Grandpa (in deep disgust): "To see by of course. Do you think sewers have windows in them?"

As the train drew up at a country station on the South-Eastern Railway, a pleasant-looking gentleman stepped out on the platform, and inhaling the fresh air, enthusiastically observed to the guard: "Isn't this invigorating?" "No, sir; it's Caterham," replied the guard.

MAUD: "I understand that Jack proposed to you last night and you refused him." Marie: "Yes; although, poor fellow, I am afraid that if he had not left me so hurriedly, I might have relented and accepted him." Maud: "So he told me."

IDIOT: "Do you think that I—aw—shall have a good beard?" Barber (after close inspection): "I'm afraid not, sir." Idiot: "Aw, weally. My fawther has aw very fine beard, you know." Barber: "Maybe you take after your mamma, sir!"

"ELLEN, has Master George come home from school yet?" called a lady down the stairs to the girl in the kitchen. "Yes, ma'am," came back the answer. "Where is he?" "I haven't seen him." "How do you know, then, that he's home?" "Because the cat's a-hidin' under the dresser."

CLARA: "I never saw such a beautiful collection of Christmas presents. Did you give your father anything?" Dora: "Why of course. You don't suppose I'd forget my own darling father, do you?" "What did you give him?" "A perfectly lovely little gold pen to sign cheques with."

VISITOR (who is fond of examining the boys is trying to impress upon them the meaning of the word concited): "Now, boys, suppose I was to imagine myself the handsome man in the village, what would I be?" Bright Boy: "Weal, sir, I wud say ya wud be a bit o' a lot, sir!" Collapse of visitor.

"My wife's Christmas presents cost her twice as much as last year." "How's that? Christmas gifts were much cheaper this season than last year." "I know that; but this year she made her own gifts, according to the directions given in a household journal, which told 'How to make Cheap Christmas Presents.'

Mrs. BRADY: "Och, Mrs. O'Toole, yer be worrukong noight and day." Mrs. O'Toole: "Yes, O'm under bonds to kape the pace for pullin' the hair of that bla'guard Missus Murphy, an' the judge tould me as if Oi touched her again he'd fine me 20s." "An' yez is working hard so's to kape outer mischief!" "No, bedad! Oi'm saving up the 20s."

IN 1915: "You needn't tell me that Mary Parsay is not more than twenty-three years old. She is nearer forty-three, and I can prove it." "But how?" "Just you watch her when she goes to cross a muddy street. Just notice how she grabs at her trousers to hold them out of the mud—the way women did twenty years ago, when they wore skirts."

THIS is a true story. Quite recently a labourer who was engaged working at a building which was being erected near Dundee, fell from a scalding to the first floor level. He sustained no injury, but, like the prudent lad he was, thought he might make something out of the affair. When picked up he moaned for a drop of "the crater" to revive him, but the overseer, who was a true Scot, said, brutally, "What, whuskey? Na—na, we cannae gie whuskey on a ten-fit f'."

In all policies of life insurance there, among a host of other questions, occur: "Age of father, if living? Age of mother, if living?" A man in the country filled up his father's age, "if living," one hundred and twelve years, and his mother's one hundred and two. The agent was amazed at this, and fancied he had secured an excellent customer, but, feeling somewhat dubious, he remarked that the applicant came of a very long-lived family. "Oh, you see, sir," replied he, "my parents died many years ago, but 'if living' would be aged as there put down."

SOCIETY.

KAISER WILHELM OF GERMANY possesses real talent for painting.

The Princess of Wales will stay in town until after the first Drawing Room, and then is going to Sandringham until Monday, March 4th.

THE Duke of York has accepted the presidency of the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick, a position which has formerly been occupied by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Coburg, and the Duke of Connaught.

The King of the Belgians recently threw open the frozen ponds in his private park at Laeken to skaters of all classes. The King and Queen were to be seen in the thick of the crowd, and the step taken by his Majesty made him very popular.

THE Queen, as at present arranged, will leave Windsor on Tuesday, March 19th, and is expected back at the Castle the second week in May. It is not decided yet whether or no Her Majesty will spend a few days in Germany before returning to England, but if she does she will proceed direct to Darmstadt on leaving Nice, travelling by the Jura-Simplon route. Her Majesty is to arrive at Darmstadt about April 25th, and during her stay the formal betrothal of the Hereditary Prince of Coburg to the Duchess Elea of Wurtemberg will probably take place in her presence, and before the Emperor and Empress of Russia, the German Emperor and Empress, the King and Queen of Wurtemberg, the Empress Frederick, and other near relations of the young couple.

ONE of the most favoured little people in Europe is the small daughter of the Grand Duke Michael of Russia. This little lady, the Countess Anastasia Torby, inherits her mother's great beauty and her father's vivacity; and, being an only child has every thought and wish anticipated. Her inseparable companion and favourite plaything hitherto has been a devoted and most intelligent fox-terrier, who invariably appears in the photographs that are constantly being taken of the baby, but this affectionate animal has now to share the affections of the wee Countess with a wondrous doll, which is a counterfeit presentment of its youthful owner. It is her exact size, and modelled in feature and form after the little girl.

THE family of the German Chancellor, the princely line of Hohenlohes, possess some unique heirlooms which are jealously guarded, and are only removed from the Castle of Neuenstein on rare and important occasions. Perhaps the most highly valued as well as the most interesting of the many priceless treasures is the so-called "Alte Hausschmuck." This consists of a finely enamelled gold chain, divided into eight parts, representing entwined thorn branches, and ornamented with enormous sapphires, which it would be found difficult to match. From this chain hangs an enamelled spray of rose leaves and a beautifully-designed rose as pendant, in the centre of the flower being a Folly's head, and also a splendid sapphire, even finer than those adorning the chain. The wonderful ornament is said to have belonged to Helene, daughter of Count Ulrich of Württemberg, who married Count Kraft VI., and is mentioned in the family archives as early as 1511. The princesses belonging to the numerous branches of the Hohenlohe family almost invariably wear it on their wedding day, amongst others who have done so being Princess Feodora of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, when married to the Hereditary Prince of Saxe-Meiningen in 1858. Since 1862 it has been arranged by special agreement that the historic chain shall be worn on state occasions by the wife of the head of the family as a special honour.

PRINCE GEORGE OF GREECE, who so gallantly saved the Czar's life in Japan will shortly accept a high post in the Russian Navy. The Prince is the favourite of all the members of the Danish Royal Family, not least of the Princesses of Wales on whom he generally is in attendance and pilots on a tricycle when at Fredensborg.

STATISTICS.

It kept going, the wheels of a watch travel 3,558 miles in a year.

ALL the land above sea level would not fill up more than one-third of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Imperial Library at Paris has seventy-two thousand works treating of the French Revolution.

THE share of land falling to each inhabitant of the globe, in the event of a partition, might be set down at twenty-three and a half acres.

RAILWAY travelling in this country is the safest in the world. In America, one passenger in every 2,400,000 is killed; in France, one in every 19,000,000; and in Great Britain only one in every 28,000,000.

GEMS.

TRUTH, like the sun, submits to be obscured; but, like the sun, only for a time.

BECAUSE all men are apt to flatter themselves, to entertain the addition of other men's praises is most perilous.

THERE is always hope in a man who actually and earnestly works. In idleness alone is there perpetual despair.

MANY use but one or two faculties out of the score with which they are endowed. A man is educated who knows how to make a tool out of every faculty—how to open it, how to keep it sharp, and how to apply it to all practical purposes.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICE WAFFLES.—One cup of boiled rice, one pint of sweet milk, two eggs, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one teaspoonful of salt, butter the size of a walnut, and flour enough to make thin batter. Bake in waffle-iron and serve hot.

CABBAGE FRIED WITH CREAM.—Chop a quart of cold boiled cabbage, fry it five minutes with sufficient butter or dripping to prevent burning. Season it lightly with pepper and salt, and stir into it half a cupful of cream or of milk, with a teaspoonful of flour mixed with it, then let the cabbage cook five minutes longer, and serve hot.

RYE BREAKFAST CAKES.—Two small cups of rye, one half cup of molasses, one egg, little salt, one and one-half cups sweet milk, teaspoonful of sultanas. Make very soft, bake in gem pans or muffin rings, in hot oven. This, with buckwheat cakes and raised biscuits, makes a change for almost every day in the week.

A DELICIOUS SWAN.—Pour half a pint of cream into a basin, and whisk it till thick; then add nearly half an ordinary sized pot of apricot jam, and a tablespoonful of sifted sugar. Whisk this together till it is well mixed and stiff; arrange it in the paper moulds such as hold sweet-breads, and adorn the top with a preserved cherry and one or two tiny strips of angelica.

ROSE CUSTARDS.—Pour a pint of nearly boiling milk upon three beaten eggs, add a few lumps of sugar, and when slightly cooled stir into the custard half a pint of raspberry syrup; if not coloured sufficiently with this add a few drops of carmine. Pour it into a buttered fancy mould; set this in a saucepan of boiling water, and let it simmer until set firm. Put aside to become cold, then turn it out.

SWEET POTATO SALAD.—Boil three large sweet-potatoes. Cut into half-inch squares. Cut into very small pieces two stalks of celery. Season with salt and pepper, and pour over a French dressing made as follows: Three tablespoonfuls of salad oil, two of vinegar, one teaspoonful of onion juice, one saltspoon each of salt and pepper. Let salad stand in refrigerator two hours. Garnish with pickles, pitted olives and parley.

MISCELLANEOUS.

It is estimated that the sunflower plant draws from the soil and exhales, in twelve hours, twelve ounces of water.

THE power of hercule, a new explosive, is almost beyond belief. A half-pound of it will move 30 tons of stone.

IN China, which has long been known as "the land of opposites," the dials of clocks are made to turn around, while the hands stand still.

PROBABLY the most extraordinary journal in the world is published weekly at Athens. It is written entirely in verse, even to the advertisements.

THE toad captures insects by darting out its tongue so rapidly that the eye cannot follow. The tip is covered with a glutinous secretion, to which a fly or other insect adheres.

THE Japanese are now getting used to glass. At first the glass in railway-carriage windows had to be smeared with streaks of white paint, to keep passengers from poking their heads through it.

A HOME of rest for horses has been started in England. Its object is to take care of horses suffering from lameness, sores, or overwork, until they are fit to work again, the owner being supplied with a sound horse in the interval.

PAPER indestructible by fire has been invented in Paris. A specimen of it which was subjected to a severe test—one hundred and forty-eight hours in a potter's furnace—came out with its glaze almost perfect.

A PROMINENT object in most townships in New Zealand is a large bell supported on a high wooden framework. This is the fire-bell, which is rung when fire breaks out in a house. All houses being built of wood, it is important that the neighbours should be prepared to prevent the flames spreading.

CANTON, with its million inhabitants, is a queer place indeed. The huge wall surrounding it, 15 feet to 26 feet wide, is six miles in circuit, the space inclosed being filled up with a maze of narrow lanes. The place is full of temples; every street has an altar. Some 320,000 of the inhabitants live on boats.

THE employment of whisky as an antidote in case of snake-bite seems to be nearing its end. Experiments have been tried with strychnine in cases of this sort, and the results are highly satisfactory. It is said to remove all unpleasant symptoms, not only of snake-bite, but of mushroom poison. On the principle of fighting fire with fire, the use of this poison should be a pronounced success.

A WHOLE library could be written on the faculty of reason as exhibited in birds. In a few words it is not possible to say much that is worth saying on the subject. There are the "bower birds," which construct with little boughs covered archways two or three feet long for play-houses, decorating them with pretty flowers, which they gather and hang over the roofs in the early morning. When the garlands are faded, they get fresh ones to replace them. They plant seeds and shoots outside the play-houses for decorative purposes, while the interior is a sort of museum of curiosities which they collect—teeth, shells and bright objects of various kinds.

THE spy system has grown rapidly in Germany. Every man in business or art is first of all a soldier, and inevitably constitutes himself a watcher, a vedette. It was the Germans who first made espionage one of the chief weapons of a military campaign. For years before the war of 1870 German spies were part and parcel of every strong place in France. They swarmed in the War Office, they held places on the staff; they were part of the Court of the Emperor. Were death the penalty of spying, Von Molthe himself would have stood small chance had the fate of war thrown him into French hands twenty years ago. He traversed all the French frontier disguised, and made with his own hands maps of the fortresses that he regarded as likely to menace his operations.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B. B.—Not for two months at least.

EMILIA.—Only course is to dye them.

OURLINS.—Nearly all blue-eyed cats are deaf.

F. T.—Quite legal, and also quite customary.

PUZZLED.—C.L.I. means cost, insurance and freight.

INQUIRIES.—It does not matter one way or the other.

LAURENCE.—Use dumb-bells suited to your strength.

CONSTANCE.—The letter is altogether ungrammatical.

LU-LU.—The water should be tepid, never used hot or cold.

VERY ANXIOUS.—It would be well to consult a specialist about it.

ANGUS.—Everything depends upon what the arrangement between you was.

H. M.—It is just as likely to upset your stomach as do you any good.

ANNIE.—The earliest form of a glove was a mere bag for the hand.

EDGAR.—Windsor Castle has been used as a Royal residence for 734 years.

J. L.—Maize is the proper name of the plant called Indian corn.

STUART.—The Established Church of Scotland has 1,26,000 members.

CONSTANT READER.—The Lord Mayor is the recognized head of the metropolitan district.

ELLIE.—We cannot tell you how to water stain an oil painted article.

FAIRYLAND FLORA.—Levity in the conduct of a girl on the eve of marriage is too bad.

C. J.—Swallows have been seen at sea over one thousand miles from land.

COCKNEY.—The American cent is below the English halfpenny in purchasable value.

IGNORAMUS.—Gaucho-ri, pronounced gosh-ri, signifies a ridiculously awkward set.

W. W.—Cheap woollen stockings are adulterated by the addition of the fibre of wood pulp.

LOVELL.—We have no knowledge of any institution suited to your requirements.

MOLLY.—It is the name of a curious woolly plant which grows in the Alps and bears a white flower.

F. S. E.—In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity.

PHIL.—The average cost of a fully-equipped lifeboat, with transporting carriage, life-belts, &c., is £700.

MAUDIE.—If it was only the rain that produced the spots they will disappear.

COMMON GARRIE.—Platonic love is properly philosophic love as distinguished from sexual or carnal love without desire.

ADELINE.—Porcelain is the finest kind of pottery, being very dense, hard, fine-grained, white, and translucent.

ROMA.—The exact height of Napoleon I. is variously stated by biographers at 5 feet 2 in., 5 ft. 3 in., and 5 ft. 2 in.

J. T.—The cost of railway construction has of late years diminished in France and increased in Great Britain.

OLD READER.—A monthly servant must give and get one month's notice before leaving or being dismissed, that is by law.

GINELLA.—A little vinegar in polish will be found to obviate the dead, oily look so often noticed after cleaning furniture.

C. H.—The electric needle is costly; a slower process is to rub the hair with pumice-stone (from painter) dropped into water, in time it splits and uproots hair.

REGULAR SUBSCRIBER.—If you have taken it to experts and they cannot cut it for you, we doubt whether it can be done at all.

BRIDGET.—The best way is to wash it thoroughly in soap suds, and use it to the best advantage under the circumstances.

MORT.—Each society of the sort has its own rules for admission. Make application to whichever you prefer.

UNDER THE ROSE.—You had better take it to the furriers. It would be quite beyond the powers of an unskilled worker.

HOUSEWIFE.—You cannot do it satisfactorily unless the wool has never before been stained, varnished, or polished.

ODDENS.—A medical authority asserts that colds and catarrhs are most frequently caused, not by cold, outdoor air, but by warm, impure, indoor air.

ROLAND.—During the reign of Charles I. of England everybody wore boots and spurs, whether he ever mounted a horse or not.

Y. C.—Restoring an oil painting is far too difficult and delicate an operation to be taught in two or three lines.

FRIGHTENED SLAVERY.—The juice of garlic, stamped in a stone mortar, and carefully applied, will closely join the broken parts of china.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Health-drinking has gone quite out of fashion, except at public dinners, wedding breakfasts, and christening feasts.

D. S.—A minor can neither sell nor mortgage his property. His legal proprietorship in his property commences at twenty-one.

S. C.—Over one-half of the sand of every shore is composed of minute shells, each of which was once the home of a living creature.

G. W.—The new cable which has recently been laid across the Atlantic weighs six hundred and fifty pounds to the mile. This is the biggest of all the cables.

IMOG.—Glass brushes are used by the artists who decorate china. They are made of glass fibres so thin that they seem like spun silk.

BROKENHEARTED.—Your anxiety to be married has blinded you. The gentleman evidently thought you a very nice girl, but never dreamed of matrimony.

FRANCO.—There were two total eclipses of the sun in the year 1713 and two in 1829. This rare phenomenon will not happen again until the year 2057.

GREGOR.—When the Armada appeared off the coast of England notice of that fact was sent all over the country in a few hours by the use of beacon fires.

FRANKLIN.—Authorities say that a fatal fall from a great height is absolutely painless. The mind acts very rapidly for a time, then unconsciousness ensues.

HELEN.

I see her in the twilight, with her sweet and pensive face;

I hear her ringing laughter in the frolic and the race; Again I see her kneeling beside her small white bed,

And listen to her evening prayer—the last my darling said.

In the springtime, too, I see her, where sweet blue violet blows,

And 'midst the summer's daisies, when the sun is getting low,

In the twilight, in the star-shine, I extend my arms in vain,

Longing, longing to enfold her to my aching heart again.

But when the heart is saddest, and the darkness dense and great,

A vision comes before me, shining forth from heaven's gate,

I see to see my Helen in the fields of living green,

And her arms are filled with flowers such as earth hath never seen.

Angello light is shining on her pure and peaceful brow, And I know my child is happy where she is dwelling now;

Her voice is sweetly ringing in the chorus of the blast,

Its echo steals upon me with a sense of peace and rest. She is not strange in heaven nor needs her mother's care,

But my little white-robed daughter is waiting for me there.

E. B. D.

IDA.—Warm bran is recommended by an authority as excellent to clean dark furs. They should be rubbed with it the wrong way. For light furs magnesia is the proper thing to use.

S. T.—The honours three of Scotland are the Crown, sword, and sceptre of the ancient national regalia now in the Castle at Edinburgh; they were so called by the antiquaries.

FORSAKED.—When an engagement is broken the correspondence which took place between the parties, if preserved, should be destroyed, or the letters returned to their respective authors.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—The climate of Peru, taken as a whole, is tolerably healthy, it differing essentially in the four great topographical divisions—the coast region, the sierra, the table-lands, and the eastern plains.

INDIGNATION.—If the parent had refused to abide by ordinary rules certainly some concession would be in order. If she knew nothing of the alleged tardiness until afterward she might at least say so.

ADOLPHUS.—Knock-knees are congenital—they are born into the individual from one or other of his parents; or they may result from constitutional weakness, or from sitting in a constrained position, like a cavalryman, on horseback.

JACKIE.—There is a flat ruler with a bevelled edge, sold at the stationers for school children; we think you will manage with that, taking care, of course, to rule with bevel turned down to the paper to prevent unrightly blotting.

JEANETTE.—It is a good plan to put a little turpentine in the starch, then, after the article is ironed, pass a damp rag lightly over it, and apply a hot polishing iron, which is round on face, and if pressed down heavily leaves a beautiful gloss.

R. A.—The "shortest day" is the 20th and 21st of December, the sun rising and setting at same hours on both days; the "longest day" is June 19th, 20th, and 21st, the sun being above the horizon for precisely same length of time on all three days.

DISTRESSER.—It is possible by skilful surgical operations so to reduce scars that they are only dimly visible; but unless the marks are exceedingly prominent and annoying it is unwise to try to do anything about it. There are no applications or salves that will do any good.

PERPLEXED.—The idea entertained by some people that violin playing is injurious to the health is not wholly without foundation. Unless care is taken that the instrument is held in a proper position the chest may be contracted, and a young girl may even become hump-backed.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER".—As a general proposition, the paper that prints the largest number of "ads" for "Help Wanted" would be best. But much depends upon where you want to work. Look over the papers and see if your line of business is represented there. Why not try two or three papers?

SUNBATH.—It is preferable, in winter, to wear loose, rather than tight clothing, because the loose dress incloses a stratum of warm air which the tight dress shuts out. For the same reason woolen articles, though not warm in themselves, appear so, by keeping warm air near to the body.

PACIFIC.—Football was invented by the Chinese many hundred years ago. The game was cultivated as an exercise suitable for the training of soldiers. It was introduced into Japan, where it became very popular. From these two countries it spread over the entire world.

M. P.—Put two ounces of newly shelled lima—thats is, the stones reduced to powder by having water poured on it—into a jar containing a gallon of water, shake, and cork; let stand over night; next day pour off the clear water which is to be kept tightly corked and used as required, a tablespoonful or two frequently, in milk.

THREE YEARS' READER.—In perforating postage-stamps a die-plate is placed below the needles of a machine carrying three hundred needles. As about 180,000,000 holes are punched per day the wear on the die plate is excessive; brass plates wear out in a day, and even steel plates are rapidly destroyed.

WILLIE.—The speed of a ship is ascertained by throwing overboard a loaded wooden kite to which a cord divided into sections with knots is attached; the kite remains stationary and the cord is run out till fourteen or twenty-eight seconds have elapsed; the number of knots then run off the reel is ascertained, and the number that would be run off at the same rate of sailing run off in an hour would be that of sailing.

ORANGES.—Take some pickled string beans, or pickled cucumbers, or gherkins, and cut them into small bits and put them thickly into a sauce tureen of melted butter, adding a spoonful of vinegar, and what's still better, the juice of a lemon. Serve it up as sauce to boiled mutton. Another substitute will be found in nasturtium seeds plucked from the stems, and pickled by simply putting them, when green, but full-blown, in a jar of cider vinegar. Add a few tablespooonfuls of these seeds to the melted butter before putting it upon the table. Their flavour is thought by some to be superior to that of capers.

FANNY.—Wash twelve ounces of rice, put it into a stewpan with four ounces of butter, eight ounces of sugar, half an ounce of bitter, and four ounces of sweet almonds (pounded), one quart of milk, and a very little salt; set the whole to boil very gently by the side of a slow stove-fire. When the rice is thoroughly done mix in the yolks of six eggs, and the whites of three whipped. Then shred four ounces of sweet almonds, previously spread, rather thickly, with butter; then pour in the prepared rice, and bake the cake for about one hour and a half; when done, turn it out into a dish, pour some diluted apricot-jam round the base and serve.

S. T.—The cod is the most useful fish in the world. As an article of food—wholesome and substantial—either fresh, or salted and dried, it forms a valuable addition to the food resources of the world, and in this and other ways few members of the animal kingdom are more universally serviceable to mankind. Enormously prolific, one fish producing nine million eggs, and widely distributed, its usefulness is appreciated almost everywhere. The tongue is considered a delicacy, the swimming bladder furnishes isinglass equal to that got from the sturgeon, while cod-liver oil has a world-wide reputation as a medicine and food in pulmonary and other wasting diseases, where its highly nutritive properties give it a great value.

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